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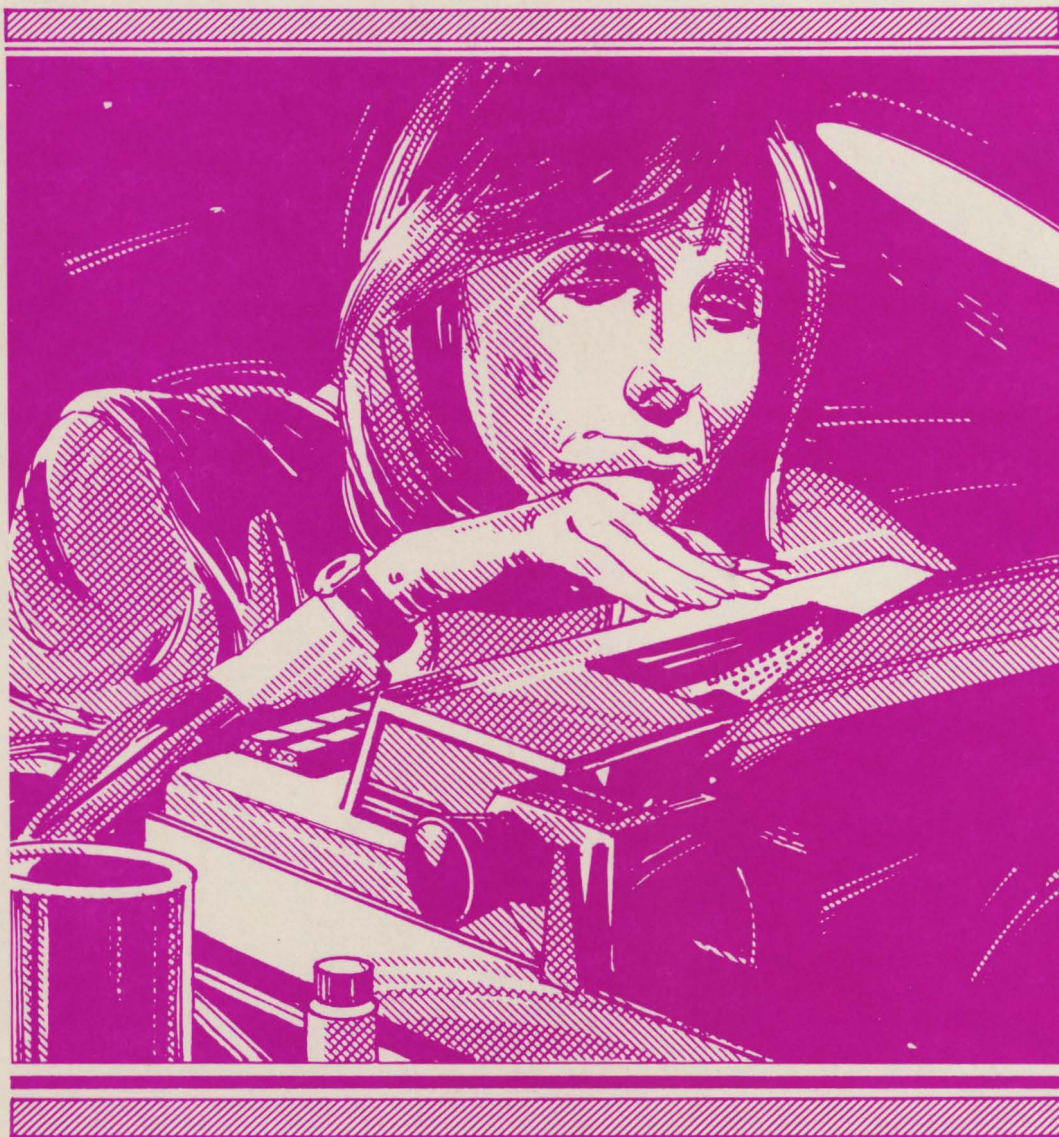
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CPR for Writers

A Help Book for Natural Resource People

- who want to write,
- have to write, or
- would like the process of writing to be simpler!



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Introduction

This book is for natural resource people who want to write, have to write, or would just like the process of writing to be simpler.

Whether you write business letters, memos, news releases, informal reports, or environmental impact statements, the goal is to make your life a bit easier, and--gasp!--possibly make you smile.

This help book succeeds if:

- you laugh a few times when you use it;
- it helps you figure out how to go about writing anything more easily; or
- you find at least one short-cut you didn't know about before.

The original publication called *Writing for Managers* was a collection of writing tips, exercises, and essays compiled for a seminar by the late Dick Friedman, a man in love with life, language, and ragtime piano-playing. A few years ago Friedman donated the materials to the Forest Service, saying, "You can have it. Go ahead and update it so it works for you!"

Special thanks to all the Forest Service people (including the talented folks in the Writer's Network) who helped round out the book. (K.C. Bowman, ed.)

Watch Your Words!

Vocabulary Can Be Fattening

If there's a Golden Rule of clear writing, this is it: **Avoid excess words!**

Overstuffed sentences are about as attractive as overstuffed blue jeans.

This doesn't mean you should throw out words you need. If you are overweight at 200 pounds, you may need to reduce. If 200 pounds is normal for you, however, reducing would only weaken you. It's the same with sentences. Researchers estimate that the average piece of business writing could be cut from 20 to 40 per cent, and be improved by the operation.

Using too many words is a common fault, and forgivable. But there's no excuse for padding sentences deliberately.

Nonprofessionals often pad their writing:

- to achieve what they (mistakenly) believe is "style;"
- to make small ideas sound important;
- to cover up fuzzy thinking; or
- to soften direct statements.

These are all pretty poor reasons.

Roundaboutations

To give you some idea how wordy we've become, here's a partial list of common phrases. Each of them is a weak, roundabout substitute for a single word:

Whereas it seems in relation to the subject
it is to be understood that
in order to have a substantial
in the amount of
on the order of (or magnitude) of
for the purpose of
in the nature of
along the lines of
prior to
subsequent to
in connection with
with reference to
with regard to
on the basis of
in accordance with
on the occasion of
in the event that
in the case of
in view of the fact that
for the reason that
with a view to
despite the fact that
give consideration to
have need for
give encouragement to
make inquiry of
come into conflict
give instruction to
is of the opinion
in large measure
make an adjustment
which is of a confidential nature
the improvement of
the purchase of

With a little effort, you can double or triple this list.

Redundancy

A common type of excess word is the redundancy. "Redundancy" is a four-bit word meaning needless repetition--saying the same thing twice in different words. Don't confuse it with repeating intentionally.

For example, these repetitions have a purpose:

- The meeting will be at 8 a.m.! Notice, that's 8 in the morning.
- We'll see you there with your ticket. Don't forget your ticket!

Whereas these are redundancies:

- We look forward to a rosy future yet to come."
- "Consolidate them together as one unit."

(Science fiction movies aside, can you ever look backward to the future? Isn't the future always yet to come? Then why not say, "We look to a rosy future?" And why not just "consolidate them?")

Some samples to rewrite:

- The rules and regulations say...
- We need a settlement that's fair and equitable...
- He was short in height, heavy in weight, and round in shape.

Here are some common redundant phrases:

- Very complete for complete,
- exactly identical for identical,
- very perfect for perfect,
- most unique for unique, and
- free gratis for gratis.

How do you get rid of the redundancy? The same way you get rid of other extra wordage: by reading and rereading what you've written and asking, "Does it really have to be said here?" If it doesn't, don't say it.

Boil It Down

How to keep your sentences short:

- Don't use words that say nothing,
- don't use words that say something you've already said,
- don't use three or four words when one will do, and
- do use periods (.)

Let's take a sample. (Note: bold-faced words in the following examples indicate where changes occur. The examples deal with several ways sentences can be shortened.)

Notwithstanding the fact that she believed **that** the inventory control program, **as a whole**, wasn't operating well, she expressed doubt **with reference to an eventual** discontinuation that one ever would happen, but she advised the heads **of the** departments that they should consolidate their reports together as one unit.

First, let's throw out those words in bold-face which say nothing, and those (underlined) that say something already stated.

Now we have:

Notwithstanding the fact that she believed the inventory control program wasn't operating well, she **expressed doubt that a discontinuation ever would happen**, but she advised the department heads **that they** should consolidate their reports.

Now let's heave out groups of words (in bold face) that say something a single word or shorter phrase could say better, and substitute the shorter terms. (See parentheses below.)

We have:

(Although) she believed the inventory control program wasn't operating well, she (doubted) (it would be discontinued), but she advised the department heads (to) consolidate their reports.

Finally, let's put in a period:

Although she believed the inventory control program wasn't operating well, she doubted it would be discontinued. However, she advised the department heads to consolidate their reports.

Foot-In-Mouth Disease, or "Many happy funerals to you!"

A cemetery monument manufacturer recently wrote to a customer to thank him for an order. His letter closed: "We hope to serve you again in the future--and often." In other words, many happy funerals to you!

If you're not careful, the standard terminology used in business letters can be pretty silly, even downright insulting. Here are some of these expressions, along with the possible reactions of a modern reader:

Terminology to watch	Possible reactions
Hereafter and henceforth	How repetitious can you get?
Kindly command me	Are you kidding?
In due course of time	After the usual boondoggling.
I wish to state	Why wish? Just say it!
Permit me to say	Take off your stuffed shirt!
We beg to state	Get off your knees!
Kindly place your order	Must I be kind?
I have before me your letter	Of course! Answer it!
We beg to advise	Why not do it like the big kids?
This is to inform you that	Thaw out, brother!
Your letter of recent date	You mean my recent letter?
Thank you for your patronage	Business is business; patrons went out of style a century ago.
As you know	If not, I'm stupid, eh?
We note your request for	Condescending of you!
First and foremost	Double or nothing, eh?

Your esteemed
communication

WOW!

Due to the fact that

You mean because?

Contents duly noted

By looking down your long nose?

We wish to thank you for

Why stand there wishing and
wanting? Just do it.

Do You Use These?

How many of these expressions do you use? How many do you notice in the letters of people who work with you? One or two won't necessarily ruin a letter, but they won't contribute anything, either. Every single one has hair on it--they've been in use for at least fifty years. The more of them you use, the more stuffy and stereotyped your letters will sound.

One of the greatest dangers of old-fashioned, hackneyed phrases is that we use them carelessly, without thinking. Consider, for example, the executive of a huge life insurance company who recently wrote to a policyholder as follows:

"As you know, your policy provides...etc. Consequently, no benefits are payable under this claim."

The policyholder, burned to a crisp, replied:

"Obviously, we did **not** know, nor did your agent know, or we would not have spent the time and trouble to make out this claim. In effect, what you are saying to us is this: you are just plain stupid--you know you didn't have a claim."

These examples rather dramatically demonstrate the need for better training in the field of business correspondence. Not one person in ten who writes business letters--including college graduates--has had adequate training in the technique and psychology of doing it. It's more than a matter of the ability to express ideas. The clearest, most lucid letter ever written may leave a reader cold, sometimes furious.

Most business correspondents simply mimic the style of the person who preceded them. And their predecessors mimicked the people before them. Is it any wonder that so many business letters sound like something dug out of an attic trunk? Some are so stuffy, formal, and frigid they might have been written by a robot.

The Dictionary of Whiskered Words and Expressions

Acknowledge receipt of	Unnecessary; if you are answering a letter, you must have received it.
According to our records	Everyone knows that you get information from your records.
Agreeable to your request	O.K., if that's how you'd say it over the telephone.
Allow me to	Sounds like a head waiter; try "let me" or "I will."
And oblige	Hoary with old age.
Anticipate	Misused in business correspondence. "Anticipate" expresses pleasure. It means to look forward to, with zest.
As regards	A clumsy way of saying "regarding."
As a matter of fact	Five unnecessary words.
As stated above As stated below	Charles Lamb, the great English humorist, poked fun at those phrases, calling those who used them "the above boys" and "the below boys." The use of such expressions as "the above statement" is discouraged.

Assuring you of our prompt attention	Would you use this if you were talking to your correspondent? Be natural. Give a definite date when possible, for example, "We will ship your order tomorrow." Expressions like "We assure you that the matter will have our prompt attention" may be used where a definite date cannot be given.
As per your order	"Per" is appropriate in a Latin phrase, as in "per annum," or "per capita." Instead of "three dollars per day," say "three dollars a day." "As per" should be avoided.
As the case may be	Sound and fury, signifying nothing.
At an early date	Where have you heard these before?
At the earliest possible moment	The customer wants to know when, and these expressions only put him or her off. Be specific.
At the present writing At this time At this writing	Very much overworked. "Now" is shorter and better.
At all times	Why use three words to say "always?"
At hand	Trite and old fashioned.
At your earliest convenience	Ambiguous. Be specific. Say, for example, "by tomorrow," or "next week."
Attached hereto find	Omit "hereto find." If anything is attached to the letter, say "attached is." Of course it will be found. It could not be attached under separate cover.
Avail yourself of this opportunity	Shades of the merchant princes!

Awaiting for further orders Awaiting your further reply	Why not ask in a direct way, as you would in conversation?
Beg to state Beg to advise Beg to inform Beg to acknowledge	"To beg" means to ask something for nothing. If you are in the begging mood, these are apt statements; but surely you are not, even if you tend to use these expressions.
By return mail	Pony express or stagecoach?
Calculate	Often misused for "expect."
Check to cover	Why not "check for?"
Come to hand	Vintage of 1890.
Command (awaiting your further)	Tradesmen will use the servant's entrance.
Contents noted	Utterly inane. If you read the letter, the contents were noted.
Date of July 1	The reader knows July 1 is a date.
Deem it advisable	How often do you "deem" in conversation?
Desire to state	Just say it; keep your desires to yourself.
Dictated but not read	Discourteous. Letter might well be returned with the notation, "Received but not read."
Due course	When is that?
Duly credited Duly entered Duly noted	Omit the handlebar-mustached "duly," "credited" alone tells the story.
Due to the fact that	Five wasted words: try "because."
E.G.	Good enough for the 19th century.
Esteemed	A relic of bygone days.

Even date	Antique as armor.
Favor	Mutton-chop sideburns for "letter" or "order."
Find	"Find" presupposes a search. If it's attached, it will be found without searching.
For your information	Silly emptiness. Anything you say is for information.
Gone forward	Do you mean "shipped?"
Hand you	"Send you" is more natural. How can one hand anything to another in a letter?
Has come to hand	If you answer a letter, the sender will know that it was received.
Hoping to receive	Participial closings are clumsy, impersonal, and out of date.
I am I remain	Only space fillers.
I.E.	Rome had her decline and fall. Why, oh, why, must we use her ancient expressions today?
I have your letter before me	Your correspondent does not care where you have his or her letter.
I have your letter of	Quite obvious, since you're answering it.
Inclosed (enclosed) herewith	"Herewith" is unnecessary.
Inclosed (enclosed) please find	Use "I am enclosing." Arrange the enclosure so that the reader will find it without searching.
In due course	Say definitely when you will do it.

In lieu of	Another hangover from ancient Rome. "In place of" is much more sensible.
In re	Latin again. Isn't English good enough?
In the amount of	Four words to say "for."
In reply wish to state	Go ahead and say it!
In this connection	Superfluous; find a better transition.
Inst., prox., ult.	Abbreviations of words borrowed from Latin. It is more courteous to specialize in English.
In the near future	Tomorrow, or next month? Be specific.
Kind of, sort of	Colloquialisms that suggest word poverty.
Kind (favor, order)	A perfectly good word, but often misused in letter writing. Ordinary business correspondence is neither kind nor unkind.
Kindly (advise, send)	Feudal shopkeeper's language.
Let me call your attention to May I call your attention to	Stilted and school-marmish; use please notice."
Oblige	Awkward. Resembles the last bow of a high school orator.
Party (a party named Smith)	By all means, let's have a party. But one person isn't a party, except at law.
Past favors	See: favor.
Patronage	All right if your customers are patrons; otherwise, silly.
Please be advised that	Superfluous and overly legalistic.

Pleasure of a reply	Would you say it that way?
Pursuant to	Legalistic and utterly silly in modern business letters.
Recent date	Quote the date.
Referring to the matter of Referring to your favor of Regarding your communication	Stilted ways of introducing a subject; find a better transition.
Regret to advise	Save your regrets for social correspondence.
Replying to yours of	Wasted words.
Said (the said party)	Correct only in legal terminology.
Same (as a pronoun)	Much better to name the subject, or say "it," "they," and so on.
State	An overworked verb; use "say."
Take pleasure	Very old and very tired.
Take the liberty	Cliche No. 104,069.
Take stock in	A very weak expression that denotes a limited vocabulary.
Take this opportunity	Hackneyed.
Thank you in advance	Trite and presumptuous.
Thanking you, we remain	A foolish, weak participial ending, probably used because the dictator's great-grandfather used it.
The undersigned	Why shy at "I?"
The writer	Don't be afraid of "I." It is a perfectly proper word.
This is to advise you	Too legalistic and superfluous.

To hand	Worse than "at hand," which is bad enough.
Trust	Antique word for "hope."
Under separate cover	O.K. if speaking of someone in a bed. Otherwise be specific: "By parcel post," "by express," and so on.
Under the above subject	Why imply that you are backing up to find where you first started?
This letter is for the purpose of asking	Why not ask without all this stuff?
Up to this writing	An awkward expression; say "up to now."
Undue delay	Vague as well as shopworn.
Upon investigation	Sounds like Sherlock Holmes.
Upon reviewing our records	Ponderous and formal.
Valued (favor, business)	Moth-eaten phrases like this sound insincere.
We are, we remain	Warmed-over emptiness.

When you rid yourself of these ancient barnacles, you will be on the high road to improved letter writing. Write as you talk, with vigor and personality.

Administrative Vocabulary

It is in process	So wrapped up in red tape that the situation is almost helpless.
We'll look into it	By the time the wheel makes a full turn, we assume that you will have forgotten about it, too.
A problem	Any assignment that cannot be completed by one phone call.

Expedite	To combine confusion with commotion.
Channels	The trail left by interoffice memos.
Coordinator	The person who has the desk between two expeditors.
Consultant (or expert)	Any ordinary soul more than 50 miles from home.
To activate	To make carbons and add more names to the memo.
To implement a program	Add more names to the memo.
Under consideration	Never heard of it.
Under active consideration	We're looking for it in the files.
A meeting	A mass nulling by masterminds.
A conference	A place where conversation is substituted for the dreariness of labor.
Reliable source	The guy you just met.
Informed source	The guy who told the guy you met.
Unimpeachable source	The guy who started the rumor to begin with.
A clarification	To fill in the background with so many details that the foreground goes underground.
We're making a survey	We need more time to think of an answer.
To note and initial	Let's spread around the responsibility for this.
"See me"	Come down to my office, I'm lonesome and need help.

Let's get together on this

I'm assuming you are as confused
as I am.

We will advise you
in due course

If we figure it out, we'll let you
know.

To give someone the picture

A long, confused, and inaccurate
statement to a newcomer.

Relief for News Releases

It Could Happen to You....

Sometime, somewhere--you may be asked to write a news release. It might be for a newsletter. It might be for a local weekly paper. It might be for general distribution. What's true is that people are interested in what we do, and the odds are that at some time you may need to put together a news release. News release writing is its own art form, but we can give you some tips.

The Hottest Tip: Keep It Short!

Aim at producing a story of about 300 words. Printed double-spaced (the way editors like to receive it), this is about a page of text. Often the goal of a news story is simply to clearly convey as much accurate information as you can in the smallest amount of space. So be brief. Be concise. Be clear. Be direct. Use short sentences that say what's going on.

Put the heart of your story in the first 30 or 40 words of the first paragraph. This is the "lead." Make it as exciting as you can: it is the baited hook that lures your audience into your communication. This first paragraph should be short and absolutely to the point. (It may be no longer than your lead).

The second paragraph should contain a good quote. When choosing your quote, find one that sounds like a real person was talking.

Succeeding paragraphs need to be short, also. Remember: big chunks of text are not very easy to read. The eye tends to skip over long paragraphs--and keep right on going!

Survival Tips

Make it easy for your most important ideas to survive intact. Put your most interesting and important ideas, quotes, and examples in the first two or three paragraphs. At least one sentence in these

first few paragraphs should supply a nutshell description of the context of the story. This helps people who don't know all the background find out the who, what, when, where, why, and how of what's going on.

Later paragraphs of news stories are used to develop your ideas, descriptions, and explanations. The sad fact is, however, that editors sometimes run out of space. That means your story may be shortened.

If you have extra descriptions and examples, consider placing them near the end of the story. That makes it easier for the editor to trim some length by simply cutting a less-crucial paragraph from the bottom. Otherwise, you may find your story drastically changed. Or it may not be used at all!

Other good touches that sell your story and enhance your point:

- Supply a four- or five-word suggested headline (you may get your way!),
- supply interesting, **sharply focused** pictures (black-and-white are preferred),
- write captions for any pictures you submit, and
- identify people in pictures clearly and accurately.

But It's A Complicated Story!

Do you have more neat things to say than can possibly be told in a mere 300 words? That's not surprising--resource management is complex, and lots of things are generally happening at once. If this is the case, mull over the most important and most interesting points, choose the best one, and focus your story around that facet.

If there are pieces of information that are really interesting, but you can't add them to the story without making it longer than a page (double-spaced), consider writing a separate news story, or use the "wish box technique."

The wish box technique is basically just hanging on to those really good pieces and using them later. Good stuff always gets used eventually. Knowing that may help you keep the current news story short--and at the very least, it makes your self-editing a little less painful!

These tips aren't inviolable rules. For example, some stories deserve and demand more leisurely treatment, or more explanation. But do consider these ideas as you write your news release. By applying them, even feature stories, which are typically a bit longer (say, 600 or 700 words) can be easier to write. After all, the purpose of these suggestions is to make your life easier!

For the final word in how to put together a good news release, see the *USDA Guidelines for News Releases and Other Materials for Distribution to News Media*.

News Photographer's Crib Notes

Okay. We confess. We can't give you the perfect path to flawless news photos. We know that. But here's an evaluation checklist that may help you select the pictures you submit.

- Is the photo clear? Undamaged? In sharp, sharp focus? (This is even more important for color photos than for black-and-white prints.)
- If it's a people picture, can you see their faces? Do the people take up more than half of the frame? (The smaller the image, the harder it is to enlarge it and still have a clear picture. Sometimes simply planning to take at least some of your people photos from a distance of 6 to 15 feet may help.)
- Is there a range of tones (light, medium, and dark) in the photo? (If the tones are all about the same, it won't reproduce well.)
- Is the background simple? (Clutter ruins a photo.)
- If it's a photo to illustrate an award story, are the people in the picture doing almost **anything** besides shaking hands? Perhaps talking together informally? Does it illustrate the reason the award was given (rather than the actual giving of the award)? Hot stuff!

If you answer yes to most of these questions, you're on track. Submit the picture!

An Active Construction is a Happy Construction

To tighten your writing and to make it dynamic, use the much-revered technique of active construction. No other single trick will help you more.

In terms of grammar, active construction means that the verb 1) follows its subject, and 2) describes some action of that subject. Any other arrangement is called passive.

"I hit the ball" is an active construction, while "The ball was hit by me" is a passive one.

Study this group of sentences.

Then the bolts should be tightened with a torque wrench.
Order was called for by the District Ranger.
The truck was driven off the road and wrecked by them.
The case was warped by the high humidity.
Seedlings cannot be produced as cheaply by any other method.

All these sentences employ passive construction. But you can see from the examples following that we can easily make them active.

Using a torque wrench, tighten the bolts.
The District Ranger called for order.
They drove the truck off the road and wrecked it.
High humidity warped the case.
No other method produces seedlings so cheaply.

"Is-ing, Are-ing, and Were-ing"

Some verbs, however, just won't lend themselves to active construction. These, the so-called "state-of-being" verbs, suggest no action. As a convenient means of determining which kind of verb you're dealing with, try to imagine someone or something **doing**

what the verb suggests. You'll be easily able to picture someone "hitting" or "thinking," but you can't evoke any picture of someone "is-ing," "are-ing," "was-ing," or "were-ing." Not readily, anyway.

Sentences that use these state-of-being verbs lack punch. For example:

The office is gray.
The covering is stapled to the frame.
I am tired of your excuses.
He seems to want more recognition.
That truck appears to have a leaky muffler.

The state-of-being verbs include all forms of to be, to seem, to feel (as in "I feel ill"), to remain, to become, and to appear (as in "Ed appears worried").

Sometimes you'll find it hard to recast sentences using these verbs. (Try making active "The house is gray!") Even so, make a determined effort to avoid these state-of-being verbs.

Making Yourself Clear

Don't Be Ambiguous

A good sentence is coherent and clear. The relationship of its parts is obvious, and no doubt exists in the reader's mind about the meaning of the sentence. But how can you be sure your sentences say what you intend?

You probably write instinctively in the subject-verb-object pattern--and that's a good start. But there's more to the problem than that.

When a sentence is unclear, the trouble usually can be traced to the less important elements--the modifiers. In a coherent sentence, all modifiers should be placed near the elements to which they belong. They must clearly modify only one element--the proper one.

Let's Have an Order of Modifiers..

Here's a fun sentence for you:

"Sam Brown was shot in the skirmish."

We can stop asking ourselves whether or not the "skirmish" is a vital organ if "in the skirmish" is placed before Sam Brown.

When a modifier is not correctly placed, it is called a "squinting" modifier. That is, it looks in two directions at once. When it is correctly positioned, the modifier looks just one way, and the meaning of the sentence is obvious.

If you don't pay attention to the order of your modifiers, you're inviting confusion. For example, look at this sentence:

"We could see Bob waving to us easily from the fire camp."

Who is in the fire camp--we or Bob? And are we seeing easily, or is Bob waving easily? Probably what was meant was, "From the fire camp, we could easily see Bob waving to us." Trouble is, we can't be sure--because the writer didn't say it. Here's another example:

"The mayor penalized those officeholders who had opposed him for good reason."

After reading this sentence we wonder if the mayor had good reason to penalize the officeholders, or if the mayor penalized those who had good reason for opposition.

Reorganizing

Usually it's a simple matter to reorganize sentences for clarity.

"I realized that I was lost by nightfall" becomes clear when the modifying phrase, "by nightfall," is placed near "realized," the verb it modifies.

The sentence then reads:

"I realized by nightfall that I was lost," or "By nightfall I realized that I was lost."

Self-test: How would you rearrange the following sentences?

Hundreds of buses were on the road jammed with foresters.
The little girl stood beside the horse in a blue dress.
She said today that he would come.
He caught the fly ball as it soared over him by running hard.
Liver should be fed to dogs cut into strips.

Outlining for Fun and Profit

Outlining is the process of planning the content of your composition or speech. Your outline helps you track what you want to say, how you want to say it, the order it all goes in, and the relevance of each idea to your subject. It can be a real help: after all, when you are writing, you've already got a lot to keep in mind--including choosing the right words, arranging them in sentences, spelling, punctuation, grammar, and making things fit.

With an outline, you can devote more energy to communicating, and spend less energy trying to remember what happens next!

There are many ways to outline. The section that follows discusses the steps of outlining as a process of stating, developing, and arranging your ideas. Following that is a slightly different technique called the "scratch outline." Try both. Use what works for you!

What is important, whatever technique you use, is that preparing an outline lets you know when you are ready to write. How can you tell?

You are ready if:

- you have a **clearly-defined subject** which you can cover thoroughly;
- you know that you can **fully develop** all your ideas with supporting material;
- your ideas are **arranged** in a logical, understandable order, and they are tied together with transitions where needed.

Inexperienced?

Beginning writers especially need to plan before they write. Many inexperienced writers are not used to stating their ideas fully. A best bet is to learn to make a sentence outline, stating your ideas completely in full sentences. When it's time to actually write the piece, you can then do an even better job of presenting ideas. In effect, a good sentence outline is a sort of first draft, and the first full draft will actually be at least as polished as most second drafts!

Steps of Outlining

1. Choose your subject.

Decide what you want to prove, demonstrate, or emphasize, and what you want your audience to "buy into" or remember. State that idea in a complete sentence. This will be your thesis statement--a sentence that both names your subject and states your central idea.

2. Limit your subject.

Most inexperienced writers tend to select subjects which they cannot cover thoroughly in the limited time they have. The key to being able to do this is to decide what specific part of the subject you can discuss successfully, and then to restate your thesis sentence to indicate that you are dealing with this more specific, limited subject.

3. Define your purpose and your intended audience.

What is your purpose in writing? What are you trying to accomplish? Is it to express your opinion, to convince your audience that your opinion is correct, to create an emotional response in your audience, to rouse them to take some course of action, to give them information?

Accomplishing that purpose takes planning. Part of this planning includes defining your audience.

Think about the following:

Who are your readers?

The public at large?

Students, or people with a certain educational background?

People in a certain age range?

People who share certain interests, experiences, or attitudes?

What are you assuming about them?

What do you assume about what they know, how they think, about what they have read and heard, and about their reasons for reading your paper?

By answering these questions for yourself, you will clarify your task and make it easier to find the appropriate methods to accomplish your purpose.

4. Brainstorm.

Using single words or short phrases, jot down your ideas as fast as you can. If you are writing from personal experience or knowledge, these ideas will come directly from your memory; if you're doing a research paper, they will come from your research notes. Your main purpose here is to get your ideas out of your head and onto paper. Keep going until your brains (or notes) are empty.

5. Restate your ideas in complete sentences.

Take the list of ideas you've quickly jotted down and rewrite each one into complete sentences. Throw out ideas that you can't state clearly in sentence form, and combine similar ideas. When you are done, you will have a list of major ideas which cover your subject thoroughly. These comprise the heart of your paper, and the topic sentences for paragraphs in your paper.

6. Develop each idea with supporting material.

Before you finally decide to put any idea into your paper, determine what you will say about it. That means looking at the facts, statistics, quotations from experts, definitions, descriptions of events and situations, comparisons, analogies, contrasts, or historical data you have available to make each idea believable, convincing, and informative.

Remember that without such material, your statements will not be of much value to your audience. With it, your main ideas will be clearer, more detailed and specific, and more informative and convincing.

If you can't adequately develop and support an idea with this kind of material, either do more research, or ruthlessly eliminate the idea from your list, for without supporting material, that idea will weaken your paper.

7. Arrange your ideas in a logical, clearly understandable order.

Now you are ready to arrange your ideas. Ask yourself what your audience needs to know first in order to understand your discussion. What information is most essential, most relevant? What ideas can you state most clearly and support most fully? Put your ideas in the order which gives your audience the clearest understanding of the subject, and which best suits your purpose.

8. Check each of your major ideas against your limited subject.

Ask yourself whether the idea belongs in your paper, or whether it's relevant to the subject. If it doesn't, eliminate it.

9. Check your major ideas against your purpose.

Have you really said all you intended to say, and all your audience will expect to know? Have you said enough to convince your audience that your point of view is sound? If not, go back to step four and add whatever is needed to cover the subject thoroughly.

10. Ask yourself if the connection between each pair of ideas (1 and 2; 2 and 3...) is obvious.

If the connection between a pair of ideas isn't obvious, add a transitional phrase or sentence that clarifies the connection between ideas that seem unrelated. If necessary, rearrange your ideas.

11. Proofread what you have written.

Check your outline for any mistakes in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Careless errors will carry over into your paper!

And Now...

When you have completed this process, you will discover that you have, in effect, written a first draft of your paper. Your ideas will be stated in full sentences, and all the details that you intend to use in your paper will be listed, along with transitional phrases to tie your paragraphs together.

Now, you can write your next (or "full") draft, devoting your full attention to choosing words, arranging words into sentences, spelling them correctly, punctuating your sentences, dividing your essay into paragraphs, and so on.

And you won't have to worry about whether you're getting off the subject, whether you're covering the subject, or whether you're putting your ideas in the right order and supporting them adequately. You will already be one draft ahead of a writer who doesn't prepare an outline, and you will be sure your paper is logically arranged and clearly developed.

An Alternative: The Scratch Outline Technique

Frequently, once you have your purpose and your reader in mind, your material will suggest its own best organization. One of several techniques for discovering this organization we call the scratch outline. It works like this:

Step 1. Jot down all the items of information you have available on your subject.

Step 2. Arrange these into groups.

Step 3. Write a cover sentence for each group. Then use this sentence to test your grouping. If all the items of information don't seem to fit under the cover sentence you've written, first re-examine the sentence. If you can rewrite it so that it works out, do so. Or, if your examination proves your cover sentence is the best you can come up with, yet it's still not satisfactory, remove from the group those items that don't fit.

Step 4. Consider each group as a separate item. Arrange these items into larger groups.

Step 5. Write a cover sentence for each of these larger groups. Again test to see that your cover sentence and your groupings are both correct.

Step 6. Consider each larger group as a separate item and arrange these into groups.

... Continue grouping, writing cover sentences, and testing your arrangements until you arrive at a single, final cover sentence.

With a minimum of pencil work, you should now have a reasonably well-developed outline, complete with a title (your final cover sentence).

Want More Ideas?

For more ideas on organizing your thoughts, breaking writing blocks, fooling around, and having a good time, see *Writing the Natural Way* by Gabrielle Lusser Rico, copyright 1983. The book is published by J.P. Tarcher, Inc., and distributed by Houghton Mifflin Company.

Not-Very Zen and the Art of Text Reviewing

Surprise! There are as many styles of reviewing as there are styles of writing.

Following are several perspectives about reviewing written material. The people who shared them have been on both ends of the stick--they've both given and received text reviews. They have a certain amount of compassion--and sometimes passion--about the process. The ideas they share can help you set yourself up to get review comments that are appropriate, useful, painless, and even exciting!

Joyce Casey Ulbrich, economist and former writer-editor, shares the following questions that the perfect reviewer would naturally consider when looking at text. The next time you review someone's written work, consider the following.

Helpful Ideas for Reviewers

1. Why are you reviewing the document?

There are many people who might have been asked to review the document--why were **you** picked? Possible reasons include:

- Your expertise in a particular subject area, such as a specific discipline, or your knowledge of the law or regulations;
- your lack of expertise--perhaps the author(s) wanted to see how the document reads to someone without special knowledge of the subject area;
- your ability to evaluate editorial points such as organization, writing "level," or spelling; or
- a more mundane reason, such as your supervisor appointed you to serve on the committee that has to review all documents of this type.

Knowing why you were selected to review the document will help you focus your review, thus saving you time, and making your comments more meaningful to the author(s).

2. Who is the document's intended audience?

It is important to know who will be reading the document. For example, you may have been asked to review the document's factual accuracy because of your silvicultural expertise, but the intended audience might be the general public. The terminology should therefore be aimed at the general public; it would be your job to insure that silvicultural terminology used in the document is accurate, while also being understandable to the general public.

If the author does not tell you who the intended audience is, ask. It is important for you as a reviewer to know this.

3. What are you reviewing for?

What you are reviewing for often goes hand in hand with why you were selected as a reviewer. There are a number of things for which you may be asked to review. Typically, they may include one or more of the following items:

- Factual accuracy--are the facts correct and properly cited? Do the document's conclusions flow logically from the facts? Remember to keep in mind that the same set of facts can often be interpreted in several ways.
- Document flow--is it organized? Are the different sections given appropriate weight? Is it choppy? Are several writing styles evident? These are "style" issues that often influence how a reader feels about the content of the document.
- General impressions--this is vague, but sometimes a reviewer's general impressions can point to problem areas that wouldn't be identified in any other way.
- Other--these might include placement of graphics, duplication of other documents, or many other items.

Don't review for things you were not asked to do--this is a waste of your time, and can also be a waste of time for the author(s) who have to respond to your comments. For example, if you were asked to review for factual accuracy, but find the document contains numerous spelling mistakes, it is best to check with the

author or the person coordinating the review. There may be someone else who will be reviewing specifically for spelling. Also, if your spelling is not very accurate, you may do more harm than good!

Remember there is a difference between reviewing, editing, and proofreading. Clarify in your own mind, as well as with the review coordinator or author, which of these you are being asked to do.

4. Note *where* and *how* comments should be made.

If you're not told, find out where to forward comments, and how to make them. You may be asked to make comments on hard copy only, or to make comments electronically on the DG. The author or a review coordinator may be collecting comments. If comments are to be made on hard copy, you may be requested to use pencil, or a certain color of pen. Remember to use tact in making comments, and make comments understandable to people who might be reading them several days or weeks later.

5. *When* are your comments due?

Make sure you know when your comments are due. If the amount of time you have been given to review the document is not realistic, say so. It doesn't help the review coordinator if comments are turned in late without previous warning. If you don't have time to read the document, it will be obvious in your review comments, and will be a negative reflection on your abilities as a reviewer.

Reviewing documents is a good way to keep up with what others in your organization are doing, and provides you with an opportunity to sharpen your own writing skills. Focusing the review using the ideas suggested here will help to make the review process more rewarding for everyone involved!

The Fine Art of Reviewing Written Work

David Caraher, management analyst and team leader, shared the following ideas about how to review written work.

Reviewing a written piece of work for someone? Don't dot the i's and cross the t's. Don't mess with the writer's words or sentences. Don't even write comments between the lines or in the margin. In fact, don't even read it. I mean it. Don't read it. Scan it instead.

Begin by scanning the whole thing. As you scan, clarify in your mind two things: 1) the writer's purpose, and 2) who it is for. To be clear about the purpose, think in terms of verb-noun pairs. Some examples might be to "communicate plans," "transfer technology," or "report progress." A simple summary of the purpose and intended reader might be:

"to communicate plans to managers;"
"to transfer technology to students;" or
"to report progress to line officers;"

It would be good if writers started with this understanding themselves. But we rarely do. In any case, it is usually helpful to both the writer and reviewer for the reviewer to clarify these points. Sometimes a writer will revamp an entire text armed with that simple clarification of purpose and audience.

Now, as a reviewer, with a clear understanding of purpose and reading audience, scan it again. Judge the scope, size, style, proportions of components, coverage of topics, and things like that.

You should look for inconsistencies between what the writer is trying to do (the purpose) and what the written work actually does. Some examples of inconsistency between purpose and effect:

- a "progress report" that includes persuasive arguments;
- a "position paper" that overdoes technical explanations;
- an "executive summary" that is several pages long;
- the body of the text addresses different material than suggested by the title;
- the text contains redundant or unessential sections;
- essential material is not addressed;
- the sections of text are not organized well;
- the tone is inappropriate to the purpose--friendly when it should be formal, or formal when it should be friendly;
- the title claims to explain how something works to the average person, but uses highly technical language and undefined acronyms; or
- the subheadings don't add up to a title.

Once you get onto this approach to reviewing, there's no end to the possible ways to help the writer. Furthermore, until someone has done this for the writer, how specific words are used or how sentences are structured is irrelevant. So at this point, you should **not** be doing what comes natural; judging the work against how you would say it, or against what is "right."

If, as you are scanning the paper, you discover inconsistencies between purpose and effect, write your findings on a separate piece of paper. Don't write in the margins or between the lines because there isn't enough room there to write the kinds of things you should be saying.

Now, if you must, read it. Go ahead and note specific spots in the document that point out examples of your findings.

Finally, don't just send a note back saying, "It looks good to me." What looks good? The scope? The tone? Structure? Coverage? Tell me. And if you're having a lot of heartburn about my sentence structure and use of words, add a review comment that says so, maybe with a couple of examples. But for goodness sake, don't restructure my sentences. Don't mess with my words. And don't dot my i's and cross my t's. Give me a real review!

Other Perspectives

Arnie Holden, sociologist, team leader, and environmental coordinator, shared the following brief thoughts on reviewing:

1. Put yourself in the place of the intended reader.

Note the questions and reactions he or she or they would have. (Remember, there may be more than one intended reader, or more than one type of intended reader).

2. Put yourself in the place of the author.

Couch your review observations in ways that make her or him want to go back and make the changes you recommend.

Thus--the reviewer is one who facilitates the communication from the author to the reader. See where that takes you...

And finally, here's a reality check for you (in the role of patient reviewee) to use when the comments finally come back:

"If it smells bad, don't eat it."

This affirming perspective is from Forest Service manager **Gary Larsen**, who claims to have translated it from the original street-corner vernacular to this more printable version.

Solid Footing Versus Muck and Mire

Terms to Use	Terms to Avoid
National Forest or National Forests	Forest Service lands
USDA Forest Service	U.S. Forest Service
Pacific Northwest Region	Region 6, R-6
National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), then NEPA afterwards	NEPA (without at least a translation)
National Forest Management Act (NFMA), then NFMA afterwards	NFMA (again, without at least a translation)
Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA), then RPA afterwards	RPA (yet again, without at least a translation!)
USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region P.O. Box 3623 Portland, Oregon 97208-3623	Any other permutations
National Forest System (only when referring collectively to all land classifications administered by the Forest Service)	NFS
When in doubt, ask yourself, "Am I helping people under- stand Forest Service programs?"	

The Art of Letters

For a Better Beginning

Following are some stiff and wordy sentences remodeled to make them more natural and to the point.

Stiff and wordy: This is in response to your letter of November 15, 1988, in which you request information in regard to the recent amendment to 40 CFR, parts 1500-1508.

Natural and to the point: We are glad to send you the information you want about the recent change in the National Environmental Policy Act.

Stiff and wordy: In accordance with the authority contained in your letter of April 9, 1988, the records of this personnel office have been amended to show your name as James Henry Smith instead of John Henry Smith.

Natural and to the point: After receiving your letter of April 9, we corrected our records to show your first name as James rather than John.

Stiff and wordy: Reference is made to your letter of June 3 to the Regional Forester of the USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region, which has been referred to this office for attention and reply in connection with your interest in a position as a proofreader.

Natural and to the point: Regional Forester Greg McClarren forwarded us your letter of June 3, with the thought that we may have job openings for proofreaders.

Stiff and wordy: This is in reference to your letter of June 17, 1988, in which you express your opinion regarding the difficulties you are encountering because of prevailing economic conditions.

Natural and to the point: Your letter about the high cost of living touches on a subject of real concern to most of us.

Stiff and wordy: This is in reply to your letter of May 2, 1988, expressing concern over the fact that you do not have a birth certificate, and asking if your Bible record of birth is acceptable proof of age.

Natural and to the point: The Bible record of your birth mentioned in your letter of May 2 may be all you need to prove your age.

Stiff and wordy: It is with the deepest regret that I must decline your kind invitation to speak at the luncheon meeting of the Rotary Club, to be held on March 14.

Natural and to the point: As much as I dislike doing so, I must decline your invitation to speak at the Rotary luncheon on March 14.

Stiff and wordy: Reference is made to your letter of April 7, 1988, enclosing the receipts for meals and lodging during the Washington Office conference, *Key Habitat and The Modern Manager*, which was requested by a letter from this office dated April 4, 1988.

Natural and to the point: Thanks for your promptness in returning the meal and lodging receipts for the key habitat conference.

Stiff and wordy: In reply to your letter of August 10, please be informed that this office does not keep statistical data on the number of people in domestic employment, but it is suggested that you inquire at the Department of Labor.

Natural and to the point: We are sorry we cannot answer your question about domestic employment. The Forest Service has no statistics of the kind. However, we believe that the Department of Labor can help you.

Stiff and wordy: An examination of the catalog of this Service reveals a pamphlet on transition entitled "*Quick Change Artistry*," which appears to be the book to which you make reference in your letter of October 4, 1988.

Natural and to the point: "*Quick Change Artistry*" may be the book you had in mind when you wrote us on October 4.

Stiff and wordy: It appears from your letter of September 2 that you are under a misapprehension about some of the requirements concerning missing or unavailable information in 40 CFR Part 1502, although your understanding of the public involvement process is substantially correct.

Natural and to the point: As you say in your letter of September 2, public participation is an important element of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). There are several other points, though, that we would like to clear up.

Business Letters and Memos

Clear, result-getting business letters are important. This section is designed to give you complete command of the skills you need to write effectively and quickly. It will show you how to weld your thoughts into logical, powerful presentations. And it will help you develop a simpler, more concise style that will make your letters easy to write and easy to read.

Economy With Words

A common fault in letter writing is to smother the reader with words--to make him or her work hard to find out what the writer is saying. Underline the unnecessary words in the following sentences.

Quiz I

1. Your letter came at a time when we were busy.
2. Our field vehicles depreciate in value quickly.
3. During the year of 1986.
4. It will cost the sum of \$99.
5. In about two weeks' time.
6. During the course of the project.
7. The equipment sells for a price of \$12,000.
8. We are now engaged in building a new guard station.
9. We work in the city of Seattle.
10. Perhaps it may be that the price is too high.
11. This is our uniform and invariable rule.
12. The storage box is made out of wood.

Answers

1. at a time; 2. in value; 3. the year of; 4. the sum of; 5. time;
6. course of the; 7. a price of; 8. engaged in; 9. the city of;
10. perhaps; 11. and invariable; 12. out.

Economizing with words is a matter of compression rather than omission; it is packing the same (or more) meaning into a smaller unit to save your reader's time, and to better your chances of communicating what you have to say. Often one word can do the work of three or four words.

Instead of...

with regard to
until such time as
along the lines of
during such time as
at the present time
in the event that
in view of the fact that
in the amount of
on the occasion of
for the purpose of
prior to
subsequent to

Try...

about
until
like
while
now
if
because
for
when
to
before
after

Avoid Doublets

Doublets are phrases which say the same thing twice, as in "final completion" (completion must be final or it's not complete). Some writers think that doublets add emphasis to their letters. Actually the second word dilutes the meaning of the first. See if you can eliminate the doublets in the following sentences.

Quiz II

1. The cosigner assumes obligation and responsibility.
2. You have our sincere and earnest wishes.
3. First and foremost, we must have a good and effective public involvement program.
4. Someone must appraise or determine what is worthwhile.
5. Foresters, too, are known by their deeds and actions.
6. It proved to be the right and proper solution.
7. Did I say I have a feeling of optimism and encouragement?
8. They could decline or refuse the invitation.
9. That is an unfair and unjust accusation.
10. Please reply to this letter at once, by return mail.

Answers

Eliminate either: 1. obligation or responsibility; 2. sincere or earnest; 3. first or foremost, good or effective; 4. appraise or determine; 5. deeds or actions; 6. right or proper;

7. optimism or encouragement; 8. decline or refuse; 9. unfair or unjust; 10. at once or by return mail.

Avoid...

ask a question
carbon copy of
consensus of opinion
entirely complete
first began to
still remains
repeat again
strict accuracy

Try...

ask
carbon of, or copy of
consensus
complete
began
remains
repeat
accuracy

Use Simple Words

The purpose of a business letter is to make a personal contact in the simplest way possible: by using the words of everyday speech. Compare the stilted expressions in Column I with the simple, direct words in Column II.

Instead of...

construct, fabricate

accomplish, perform

initiate, commence,
inaugurate

therefore

nevertheless

terminate, conclude,
finalize

utilize

deem

assistance

substantial portion

reside, dwell

stated

Try...

make

do

begin

so

but

end

use

think

help

large part

live

said

ascertain

learn, find out

afford an opportunity

allow

procure

get

Of course, sometimes little words are not suited to what you are writing, or long words carry your message more effectively. In such cases, you should use the long word if it says what you mean and is clear to the reader. A well-developed ear for English is the final authority.

Watch Your Sentences

One good defense against unnecessary words is careful editing of each sentence. Sometimes you'll find you can simply cross out the excess words; other times you may have to rephrase the sentence. Try editing these sentences.

Quiz III

1. Enclosed please find copies of the brochures you asked us to send you in your letter of December 14.
2. Upon receipt of your completion of the enclosed form, we will be pleased to expedite matters in the underwriting and processing of your recent application for insurance.
3. Mr. Cartwright has told me that he fully expects to be in the office on February 14, and he also tells me he is looking forward to seeing you then.
4. It affords us great pleasure to tell you that you have our permission to reprint our article on new developments in cold storage of bare-root tree seedlings entitled "*The Iceman Cometh Back*."

Answers

1. Here are the brochures you requested.
2. Please fill in the enclosed form so that we may process your application.
3. Mr. Cartwright will be in the office on February 14, and is looking forward to seeing you then.
4. We are pleased to grant you permission to reprint our article "*The Iceman Cometh Back*."

Many people who write clear, well-organized opening paragraphs seem to have trouble saying goodbye. Frequently an otherwise effective letter is spoiled because the writer feels he or she has to close with a flourish. The most effective letters close gracefully and maintain a friendly tone throughout.

Closing Letters

Many a letter which started with a provocative opening and proceeded to a well-organized statement of its purpose has been ruined by a contrived final paragraph or a meaningless formality. If the purpose of your letter is to suggest action, it is more forceful to use a direct statement. Participial closings such as "Hoping to receive your future comments, we remain..." or "Thanking you for your comments, we are..." are not effective.

A good closing adds something to the letter and tells the reader what specific action the writer wants him or her to take. It does not drag in a lot of useless, weary words just to say goodbye. Examples follow.

Poor: Trusting we will hear from you...

Good: We are looking forward to your reply.

(This suggests action; it is not merely hopeful.)

Poor: Thanking you for your kind consideration, we hope you will be able to use the enclosed information to your advantage.

Good: The enclosed brochure will give you more complete information. If we can help you further, please ask.

(This suggests action and expresses a willingness to cooperate.)

Poor: May we have the pleasure of sending our representative to see you?

Good: Our representative will be happy to demonstrate the techniques to your field crews. She'll call at any time you request.

(This suggests action from the reader's standpoint.)

Finishing It Off

The ending of a letter should be clear (if you want the reader to do something), courteous (avoid a cold, curt ending without being flowery), and complete (let the reader know you have finished). The danger in writing a final paragraph just to have an ending is that the reader frequently loses interest in what you said previously if you bore him or her with a tedious closing flourish. When you've had your say, request a definite reply or action (if needed), say goodbye courteously, and end the letter.

The Tone of a Letter

The tone of every letter you write should convey positive good will, positive warmth, and positive interest in the reader as a human being. It's easy to write cordial, friendly letters if you remember that letters are written to people by people, not by an agency to an agency. It's true that many business letters deal with subjects which are technical and impersonal, but you do not detract from the dignity of such letters by humanizing them.

When writing as the representative of your work group, you may feel it improper to insert too personal a touch; on the other hand, it is not necessary to be formal and cold. As mentioned earlier, the stilted phraseology of the so-called "language of business" is outmoded, and is being replaced by simple, more casual wording.

Phrases such as "It is believed" or "It is requested that you comply immediately" can be avoided by using a more active verb, which automatically gives your letter a friendly tone. It sounds better to say "the Recreation staff believes" or (even better!) "We believe..." If you are looking for a definite response, you can be polite about it and say, "Please let us know by July 15 if you'll be able to comply with our request."

Much advice concerning letter writing today cautions us to be brief and to weed out needless words. But danger lurks in a too-short letter as well. If a letter is abrupt, it can be offensive. If too little information is given, it's a waste of time and money. Information that gives the reader a clearer understanding of a problem or proposal does not constitute needless length. Equally useful and important are words that convey a courteous tone.

Choosing the Right Word

Many words have more than a dictionary meaning. Some have the power to repel a reader. This power makes them good words to avoid. Such phrases as "as you were previously informed," or "we are at a loss to understand why you directed your inquiry to this office," don't really need addition of the word **stupid**--the inference is quite clear without it.

In the next examples are some words or phrases that give a letter an arrogant tone.

Blaming: "Your **failure** to submit the required receipts in a timely fashion as required forced us to delay processing your payment documents" makes it clear that the reader is not very bright.

More kindly: "We are sorry that your payment was delayed, however we could not turn it in last week as planned because we didn't receive your receipts in time."

Alienating: "Successful managers usually submit **more effective proposals than this** when they apply for additional funding" makes it seem as if the writer considers the person and his or her discipline to be inconsequential, and not really worthy of attention.

More effective: To be more effective, the writer might have said: "In past years, many managers who received additional funding submitted very detailed proposals."

Positive Language

Positive words make it easy for the reader to agree with you and make your letters friendlier.

Negative: We cannot send you a sample for your book.

Positive: Good wishes on your new book! We have searched our files but have not been able to find the samples you need.

Negative: You misunderstood our instructions so, before we can ship the goods, you will have to make out another order blank.

Positive: Evidently our instructions for completing the order blank were not clear. Please fill out the enclosed form (indicating whether the goods and invoice should be sent to the same address) and we'll ship your order immediately.

Use Personal Words

The readability of a letter increases in direct proportion to the number of personal words used. Even though you begin with "Dear Ms. Katz," you can add to the cordiality of the letter by repeating her name later on. "May we suggest, Ms. Katz, that you study and compare the relative merits of the safety equipment illustrated in the catalog." Other good words to personalize letters are words that stand for people, such as pronouns. (Sometimes words like husband, wife, or child also work well, if they fit the topic.)

Here are examples of how to increase readability by using personal words.

Impersonal: "In accordance with your request, we are pleased to forward herewith our interpretive historical brochure, *Earth, Wind, and Fire: The National Forests During the Depression Era*."

Personal: "Here is the *Earth, Wind, and Fire: The National Forests During the Depression Era* brochure you requested, Ms. Throop. We hope you enjoy it."

Impersonal: "Please disregard the notice sent to you November 1, 1988, stating that you had used 42 hours more annual leave than you had accumulated. The records of this office now indicate that your leave record is in good order."

Personal: "We made a mistake in notifying you on November 1 that your annual leave for 1988 was overdrawn, Mr. Berger. Our records show that you in fact have 42 hours of annual leave to use before the end of the year. We hope you enjoy your time off!"

How to Make Your Memos More Effective

Nothing happens until the reader of your memo gets your message. The responsibility of getting your message through is yours. When you write your memo, concentrate on what you have to say. Keep your words flowing. But don't think of words as merely words. Think of your reader and how you can best make him or her understand your message. You can improve your memo-writing skill through the following steps:

1. Plan ahead.

Organize your thinking, and think ahead. What is the central thought of your memo? If it's vague or ambiguous to you, your

message is likely to be dull or even confusing to your reader. Spell out your main idea in a clear sentence.

2. Organize your thinking.

Gather all your ideas and all your material. Analyze the problem, but be sure you sift out all extraneous detail. Now, draw your important conclusions.

3. Think in terms of your reader.

This will help you to "speak" his or her language. Communication is effective only when you and your reader share a common knowledge of the subject discussed. Be sure you think in terms of your reader's thought patterns.

4. Decide on the purpose of your memo.

Are you merely presenting a body of facts or information? Or do you want your memo to influence your reader's thinking and have him or her follow your suggested course of action?

5. Is your reader top management?

Write about end results. Talk about performance--prevention of hassles or lawsuits, perhaps, or potential savings in time and labor.

6. Prepare your outline.

Your memo only has room for a few headings. The following points are key ones:

- a. The subject or main idea of your message;
- b. the name of the person who is to get your message;
- c. your objective (what you want to accomplish);
- d. a concise synopsis or summary of your message (this may include your findings and recommendations); and
- e. explanations (proof, if possible) to strengthen your message.

7. Give your memo an action title.

If appropriate, you may use your conclusion or most important problem as your title.

8. Summarize your main points.

Early in your memo, give your reader a preview of what you want him or her to know. A summary of your main points will make your reader want to go further. Don't bury your most important ideas or arguments in the text or body of your memo.

9. Don't confuse your reader.

Perhaps the most common cause of confusion is overloading a message with roundabout expressions and irrelevant detail. It's better to pin down an idea with forceful verbs and image-building nouns. Be careful in your choice of words.

10. Write clearly and simply.

A common fault many people share is trying to impress their colleagues or superiors with long, involved sentences. The smart writer uses simple language that can be quickly understood.

Writing Effective Letters

Suggestion Set 1: Plan Your Letters

When you start to dictate or pen a letter, do you always know your exact purpose? Many writers don't, and go off half cocked, before they've taken aim! They are the authors of fuzzy letters, reports, and instructions that cause untold waste and confusion. They need to plan before they write.

To plan a letter, follow these steps:

1. **define** your exact purpose,
2. **know** what you want to say, and
3. **visualize the reader** and his or her interests.

Sometimes, if you are writing on behalf of another person, a fourth step is required:

4. **visualize the signer:** What would he or she say? And how?

Let's look at each of these steps in planning.

Step 1: Defining your exact purpose.

Ask yourself, is this communication needed? If so, would a personal visit or call be better? Sometimes letters are written to record someone's position--for credit or protection--rather than to achieve a constructive result. Some writing for the record, of course, is necessary.

Your purpose may be to give information or instructions, or to ask for them. Or it may be to persuade someone to do something you want. To get results, you first must be clear about the results you want!

Step 2: Figuring out what you want to say.

For this step, get your facts both complete and straight. You probably need an outline somewhere--in your head, on writing paper, or perhaps on a napkin. Many writers find a written outline helpful. An outline is also a handy way to see where you may tend to wander off track.

Step 3: Visualizing the reader and his or her interests.

Some of us are so conscious of the signers of our letters that we forget the addressee. For effectiveness, think about the reader and his or her problems, desires, and responsibilities.

Step 4: Visualizing the signer, and what and how he or she would say.

Someone once said that in government, "no one writes what he signs or signs what he writes." That is an exaggeration. However, if you do ghost-write for the signature of others, you must figure out what the signer ought to say, and what he or she may be willing to sign.

To do that, you need to be familiar with the programs involved. You must also understand the signer's relationship organizationally--and perhaps personally--to the addressee. To hit the mark the first time, know your purpose and plan how to achieve it.

Suggestion Set 2: Check Your Writing

The check list below can help you take stock of your writing habits.

Can you answer "yes" to the following questions about each thing you write?

Is it:

Complete?

Does it give all necessary information?

Does it answer all questions?

Concise?

Does it contain only essential facts?
Does it include only essential words and phrases?

Clear?

Is the language adapted to the readers?
Are the words the simplest that carry the thought?
Do the words exactly express the thought?
Is the sentence structure clear?
Does each paragraph contain only one central idea?
Are these ideas presented in the best order?

Correct?

Is the information accurate?
Do the statements conform with policy?
Is the writing free from errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation?

Appropriate in tone?

Will the tone bring the desired response?
Is the writing free from words that may arouse antagonism?
Does it in any way reflect irritation?
Is it free from stilted, hackneyed, or legalistic phrases?

Effective as a whole?

Is it passable, containing weaknesses, but good enough to be approved?
Is it fully satisfactory?

And...is it on time?

Suggestion Set 3: Make Your Letter Concise

Which letters do you read first, the short ones or the long ones?
Most of us put a long letter aside (or pass it on to an assistant).
When we get around to reading it, we wonder, "Why is the writer so long-winded?"

Surveys have shown that most letters can be cut 30 to 60 percent by removing unessential facts and words.

To hold the attention of readers:

Include only essential facts.

Don't repeat the incoming letter--at most, sum it up in one sentence.

Don't tell the reader what he or she already knows.

Don't explain the obvious.

Don't drag in unnecessary detail.

Don't be a babbling brook. Decide what to say. Say it. Stop.

Avoid repetition.

The report is nearly complete (at the present time).

It is the consensus (of opinion) that...

The contract will be (null and) void.

Prune superfluous words and phrases. (Parentheses enclose extraneous words.)

(You are advised that you should) send the report (directly) to this office.

A copy is enclosed (herewith for your information and guidance).

(Your attention is directed to) Section 3 (which) says...

(We have received your letter.)

Reduce phrases to single words.

Instead of...

Try...

for the purpose of

to

in view of the fact that

as, since, or because

give consideration to

consider

How Long Should A Good Letter Be?

Let's make each letter long enough to do its job--no longer. A ten line letter can be too long, and a three page letter too short.

Too few of our letters are concise. Let's squeeze out the air!

Suggestion Set 4: Make Your Letter Clear

Write every letter so the reader will understand it in one reading, and so it can not be misunderstood. Here are some tips.

Think clearly. Your writing mirrors your thoughts.

Visualize the reader. Consider what he or she knows and thinks about the subject.

Write in the reader's language!

Choose short words.

Concrete and specific words are usually more familiar and clear (and also shorter) than abstract and general words. *Reader's Digest* averages less than two words of three or more syllables per typewritten line.

Keep sentences simple, and shorter than four typed lines. The sentences in *Reader's Digest* average well under two typewritten lines.

Start by telling the reader what it's about. Reasons, qualifications, and facts mean more to the reader if they are stated **after** the main thought.

Put your thoughts in order. Lead the reader step by step through your message. Don't wander, jump, or backtrack. Place main ideas where they will stand out--first or last in each paragraph, and first or last in the letter.

Suggestion Set 5: Obsolete Phrases

We no longer end our letters with "Your most obedient servant," but some of us use other discarded phrases--phrases that date the writer, such as:

We have your kind favor of...	(Favor means letter. Is it kind?)
we beg to remain...	Are we beggars?)
yours of the 13th instant...	(April 13 is clearer.)

The bowing and scraping of shopkeepers before lordly patrons in England made servile phrases common, but such feudal phrases

have largely died out since 1776. Here are more phrases that belong with lace collars and quill pens:

We beg to advise
kindly (please) be advised that
thanking you, we are
trusting that this answers your questions, we remain

Readers may think we are living in the Dark Ages if we use old-fashioned English.

Outdated phrases...

Preferred...

As of even date herewith	(Just write the date.)
please find attached hereto	attached is
please find enclosed herewith	enclosed is
I beg to hand you herewith	enclosed is
post haste, with great dispatch	promptly, immediately, or state a deadline.

Effective writers avoid such outmoded phrases because they say little or nothing, and they interrupt the reader. They sound unnatural and insincere, like this dinner grace intoned by a tired government letter writer: "Dear Lord, we are in receipt of your kind favors of recent date, and beg to thank you for same. Hoping to merit your continued courtesy, we remain..."

We do not talk like that. Each message on paper is, in effect, a talk; direct, clear, and simple.

No regulation says that we must use obsolete phrases. Common sense says our writing should be alive and natural--in the language of today.

Suggestion Set 6: Rubber Stamp Phrases

What would you think if the person you had invited to lunch called back and said, "Reference is made to your recent phone call, the contents of which have been duly noted. Please be advised that the recipient of your kind invitation is otherwise occupied for lunch on the day mentioned. It is suggested, however, that you invite the speaker to lunch again at some future time."

Opening Phrases

Such stilted phrases would sound silly in speech. In writing they also seem silly. Consider for example "the contents of which were duly noted." Doesn't this whole phrase simply mean that someone read the letter? Why tell the reader that? And how is a letter "duly noted?"

Worn out phrases are most common in the opening sentence. Such stereotyped phrases make a poor first impression: they say little or nothing, and they imply that the writer is winding up in the hope that while dictating he or she will think of something to deliver.

Let's scrap these poor starts:

Your letter was duly received...
We are in receipt of...
Receipt is acknowledged...
I have your letter of...

(Can you answer letters you have not received? These four phrases say only what is obvious.)

Others to unload:

I have read your letter of... (We read all letters, don't we?)

Reference is made... (To us this phrase may sound common; but to the public it is peculiar and is typical--gasp!--bureaucratese.)

Let's use these openings sparingly:

This will acknowledge... (This is all right when the letter acknowledges only and says nothing else. Even then, "Thank you for your letter..." is usually preferred.)

Replying to your...

In reply to you...

By your... In your...

With reference to... (Writing specialists condemn these as trite and weak openings that delay the message and fail to arouse interest.)

In simple letters of reply the first sentence can often give the answer. In complex letters the first sentence or two should prepare the reader for what is to come. The following openings start rather than delay the message:

Enclosed are the forms you requested May 1.
You may proceed as recommended in your letter of May 1.
Here is the report on...as you requested April 1.
Your recommendation of May 1 on...has much merit.

(Note that times and dates are slipped in easily and naturally.)

Let's drop these...

dated May 1
under date of May 1
at the present time
is presently employed
at some future time
your letter of recent date
up to this writing we find

Preferred...

May 1
of May 1
is, are, now, at present
is employed
will
your recent letter
we have found

Miscellaneous

Bromides...

as per statement
attached hereto
we are attaching hereto
we returned same
it is going forward
in accordance with
your request
we are sending under
separate cover
we wish to state at
this opportunity

Preferred...

according to the
attached statement
attached is
we returned it
we sent it
at your request, as you
requested
we are sending separately

(Don't beat around the bush!
Just say what's on your mind!)

Faith, Hope, and Charity Endings

Many writers end with:

Trusting that this will answer your questions;
we hope this answers your questions; or
we hope this gives you the information you desire.

If we have prepared our reply carefully, we need not depend on faith or hope. But if we are not sure of our answer, we may well add: "Please write us if you have more questions," or "Let us know if we can be of further help." These tell the the reader that we want to be helpful.

"Thanking you in advance" may be charitable, but some think it is presumptuous; it is unnecessary and makes a weak ending.

You take it from here. You can cite many more hackneyed words and phrases. We all tend to work pet expressions to death. Make a list of the words and phrases to which you are addicted--then throw away those rubber stamps!

Suggestion Set 7: High-Hat Language

"The wish to have the pompous, silkhatted gentleman slip on a banana peel is almost universal," say Grady and Hall in *Writing Effective Government Letters*. "Readers feel the same way about correspondents who write in a pompous, high-hat style. Pretentiousness not only robs letters of sincerity and naturalness, but it also creates antagonism toward the writer and the institution he represents."

Following are some expressions and things to think about before using them.

Harumpff!

Second thoughts...

I have the matter under advisement. "I am considering" is better.

I have read your letter of...
I have before me your letter of...

Pompous, trite openings.

this is to inform you ...
you are advised that...
for your information...
you are informed that...

These are examples of talking down.
Do they tell the reader anything?
They are worse than useless: they irritate but do not inform.

the writer wishes to state...
I should like at this time to state...

Don't announce each thought--
just say it.

your attention is directed ...

Just cite the rule or problem--
don't rub his or her nose in it.

Orders or Commands

Did the general say "You are directed not to shoot until you see the whites of their eyes?" "You are directed" adds words to an order and rubs many civilians the wrong way. If you must give an order, write it simply, without fanfare.

Samples (bossy words in parentheses):

(You are directed to) submit monthly reports on...
Supervisors are (directed) to report all accidents.
(It is directed that you) don't give up the ship.

Requests

In our letters we often request action of the reader. To get willing and early action rather than grudging and late action, **it pays to be tactful. Lye and soft soap both clean, but lye also burns.**

Lye...

you are requested

it is my desire

this office is
desirous of

Soft soap...

please,
we would appreciate

I should like,
I suggest...

we desire, we need,
please

Simplicity

A man in a high hat and on stilts may feel dignified as he looks down on others. But to others he appears awkward and ridiculous--as do letters that are full of stilted phrases.

The essence of dignity (and of good writing) is simplicity.

Suggestion Set 8: Words That Antagonize

It is said of good newspaper articles that reading the first paragraph makes you want to read the rest. Writers of letters, reports, and instructions can also use this strategy to advantage.

Writing is effective if the reader reads it with interest, and reacts as we desire. Some ways **not** to achieve this are to be dogmatic, or to boss him or her around.

1. Let's not put the reader in the wrong!

We all may occasionally have the urge to pin blame on someone else, but what salves our ego may sting someone else.

This could sting...

"Your statement that the tank...has no 'air breather' is incorrect."
(The writer did not mean to offend; he was simply setting the record straight. But the stress is on what's wrong, throwing all the blame on the reader.)

Preferred...

"Our plans would have been clearer if the 1/4-inch clearance between the tank and its cover had been labeled "air breather." (We can gain stature by shouldering blame.)

Critical words aimed at the reader tend to arouse his or her resistance.

Prime examples include your statement is **untrue**, you are **wrong**, you **failed** to, your **error**, your **refusal**, and your **surprising** statement.

2. Let's not sound superior.

Some expressions may antagonize the reader by implying that we doubt him or her, or automatically assume that our judgment is better.

Watch out for language like you **state**, we **disagree**, you **claim**, the facts **contradict your assertion**, **why didn't you**, **why don't you**, and **your plan will not work**.

3. Let's not be too positive.

Some words that often are harmless may be presumptuous when used to introduce our own views or opinions.

Sometimes presumptuous: it stands to reason, of course, obviously, the fact is, certainly, undoubtedly...

Less aggressive: I believe, we think, it seems to me, we suggest...

4. Let's not appear bossy.

It is easy to rile up our readers by ordering them around with you **shall**, you **should**, you are requested, **you must**, and so on.

Let every word be considerate and courteous. (For more thoughts, see Suggestion Set 5 on "High-Hat Language.")

Suggestion Set 9: Vague Words Obscure Thought

An engineer reported:

"Administrative sanction has been received to reserve a preponderance of safety unit manhours for the accomplishment of major safety objectives to preserve associated priorities, and when necessary, out-department assistance and/or overtime has been sanctioned for the accomplishment of the by-product phases which cannot be completed within the regular tour of duty."

What a clutter of vague words and clauses! The writer's thoughts may have been clear, but not to any reader.

1. Abstract versus concrete expression.

The word "dog" flashes an image to our brain, and so is a concrete word. But abstract words--like administrative, technical, responsibility, authority, or coordination--do not give us clear mental images. Instead, as someone once said, "Words like that skid off the top of my head!"

Abstract words invite misunderstanding. For example, many quarrels can grow out of statements like:

"Division X has responsibility for technical coordination of design work; Division Y has administrative responsibility for the efficiency of operations."

Oh yeah?

2. General versus specific language.

"Dog" is concrete and fairly clear. "Dog" gives us a more clear and specific image than does "animal"--but less clear and specific than "collie." "The mammal moves" tells us little. "Lassie leaped at the intruder's throat" is vivid.

From general Technical engineering	through intermediate civil engineering	to specific civil engineering design
Mammal	animal, dog, collie	Lassie
Facility	barrier, dam	Shasta Dam

To be clear, we need to narrow our thoughts and writing down to concrete cases, and to define the abstract and general with specific images or examples. However, the challenge is to use no more details than are needed.

3. The right word.

Use the word that will give the reader your idea clearly and concisely--to paraphrase Goldilocks, go for the word that is neither too broad nor too narrow, but just right. Exact words are shortcuts.

As Mark Twain is reported to have said, "The difference between the right word and the nearly right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug."

Red flags: Words ending in -tion, -bility, -ness, -ment, -ate are the red flags of abstract language. Use few!

For example, some professors studying the Department of the Interior tried to clinch an argument with: "The implementation of the recommendation is essential to genuine field coordination and integration."

Suggestion: Don't group your general words--space them and use few of them. Watch out for words like:

Vague nouns	Vague verbs	Vague adjectives
responsibility	implement	interesting
coordination	effectuate	considerable
administration	supervise	technical

A yardstick: Abstract and general words tend to be longer than concrete and specific words. On the average, the use of three words of three or more syllables per typed line is too much for most general readers; two such long words per typed line is about average for general interest magazines.

Therefore, prefer the short word--if it fits. As Edmund Burke said over 150 years ago, "A very great part of the mischiefs that vex this world arises from words."

Suggestion Set 10: Man Bites Dog

The theme of these suggestions for writing letters is "stick to simple English." Several sections have dealt with words. Now we start on simple sentences.

Keep it short.

All authors on style say "Keep your sentences short." Long sentences tend to confuse the reader.

Who does what?

One sentence pattern stands out: That's the "Man bites dog" or who-does-what pattern. For writing statements of fact, stick close to the word order of subject-verb-object (who-does-what), as in "Man bites dog!"

Let's take a typical sentence apart.

"The drainage of the area is accomplished by three streams."

What is the real subject? "Drainage" is in the subject spot but it should be the verb. The writer had taken the obvious verb, "drain," added "age" to it, and so let "drainage" masquerade as the subject. Then with the action word gone, he was forced to use "accomplished" to get a verb into his sentence.

To simplify the sentence further, put the real subject up front. Then we have **"Three streams drain the area."** It's also shorter: only five words instead of ten.

Tip: Other words like "accomplished" that signal weak and wordy sentences are occurred, happened, and transpired. For simple, easy-to-read sentences:

1. find your real subject,
2. find your real verb, and
3. put them in subject-verb-object order.

Meanwhile, remember: Who-does-what is the natural order, as in "Man bites dog."

Suggestion Set 11: Who Is "It"?

Do you remember when you couldn't get a letter signed with an "I" or "we" in it? Some of the old dodges used to avoid writing I or we have faded away.

These days, "the writer" is considered quaint as a substitute for "I" in correspondence, and is losing ground in books and reports. And you never see "office letter" used for "our letter" any more.

The impersonal style of writing is giving way, both in and out of government.

The trend is clear. A manager wrote: "I understand that many members of our staff have the impression that they are supposed to write in the impersonal and stilted style typical of much writing in government. That impression is wrong. I see no reason, for example, why anyone should write, 'It is suggested that consideration be given to the report attached hereto,' when he means, 'We suggest that you consider the attached report.'"

What's wrong with an impersonal style? These two weaknesses stand out:

1. It's unclear.

The impersonal style often fails to make clear who did what, who thinks what, or who is to do what.

An engineer wrote in a field report, "It was inspected." Who inspected it? Another employee reported, "It was agreed..." The supervisor asked, "Who agreed?" Always make the **who** clear!

2. It's inhuman.

Letters in impersonal style seem to deny that human beings exist. They refer to functions, responsibilities, offices, and "it"--especially "it!" Everything but people. Yet our work is done by people and for people.

"It" is a neuter pronoun, neither masculine nor feminine. "It" properly refers to lifeless, sexless objects, and fits in idioms like "it is raining" and "it is important to..." But "it" is a poor substitute for I and we.

People want to feel they are dealing with people, not with robots.
So avoid such cold, stiff phrases as:

It is felt;
it is regretted;
it is appreciated;
it is believed; or
it is suggested.

And instead of "this office," use "we," or "my staff," or "us."

Remember, if you chloroform your reader with lifeless words,
don't expect him or her to leap to do what you want.

Get the "you" attitude.

Now don't think you need to fill your letters with I, my, we, and so on. Not at all. For if you think only of yourself, you invite resentment. And if you think "I-I-I," the reader senses it, even though you use impersonal style. Abe Lincoln once said he thought twice as much about the reader or listener as about what he wanted to put across. He used the "you" attitude.

Visualize your reader.

Picture the signer of the letter talking face to face with the reader. Then write as the signer would talk--not exactly, but like it. Don't write anything in language he or she wouldn't use in talking.

Remember: State clearly the who, as well as what, where, when, and why: the 5 W's.

Use the "we-you" style wherever it fits, with emphasis on the "you."

Suggestion Set 12: Paragraphing for the Reader

The paragraph is the building block of the letter or report. It conveys one main thought. Most paragraphs open with an introduction of the main thought, develop the thought with details or examples, and close with the appropriate conclusion or response. The sentences develop the one main thought logically from opening to close.

Lawyers and writers of field trip reports often risk losing the reader or confusing him or her with paragraphs that are too full.

The reader may misunderstand (or not try hard enough to understand) a statement made up of bloated paragraphs.

If your paragraph runs over 10 to 12 lines, try to cut down on the verbiage or detail, or chop it in two or three coherent pieces.

In breaking paragraphs into easily-understood chunks, don't go to the extreme of making every single sentence a paragraph. Use the one-sentence paragraph sparingly, like the exclamation point, to give a thought extra emphasis. A rule-of-thumb is that the average readable paragraph consists of three to six sentences, with a total of less than a dozen lines.

If your paragraphs average much over a half-dozen lines, study them carefully. Long paragraphs usually result from long words, empty phrases, complex sentences: in short, long-windedness. Perhaps that's why we tend to skip over long paragraphs in our reading.

Try testing the paragraphs in several of your recent letters and reports with these questions:

1. Does the first sentence state the central question, assertion, or fact?
2. Does the last sentence express the appropriate conclusion or response?
3. Do the sentences proceed logically without too much verbiage or detail?
4. Does the paragraph contain three to six sentences, in 12 lines or less?

Remember: Build unified paragraphs that your readers can easily grasp.

Fine Tuning

Those Openings and Closings

Two important spots in a letter are the opening and closing. The first paragraph gives the reader his or her first impression of you; the last paragraph leaves the final idea (or ideas!) you want to put across.

Openings

Sometimes openings sound as if the writer wasn't prepared to begin. First there was a rambling winding-up period such as, "In reply to your letter of October 6, I wish to state..." Or maybe he or she started out by criticizing the reader in the first sentence. Oops!

Your opening will make a favorable first impression and catch the interest of the reader when you:

- Get in step with the reader;
- say something important to him or her; and
- orient your reader to the subject of the letter.

Here are other suggestions for good openings:

1. Get the reader in the picture whenever possible.

Your reader is as interested in his or her self as you are in yourself! Try starting your first sentence with "you."

2. Grant, if you intend to show action in his or her favor.

Really, it's just telling your reader what he or she has been waiting to hear. A good rule to remember is grant right away, but take longer to refuse.

3. Say what you can do.

If you must apologize, put it in a less conspicuous place. Don't spread gloom with your first words. Smile first!

4. Keep the first sentence relatively short. Don't throw a blockbuster like the following at the reader--especially at the beginning!

Example: I realize that it is the responsibility of the District silviculturist to determine when plantations are not successfully regenerated, but the Forest Supervisor has expressed a concern about the status of the Wett River area, which has a few troublesome reforestation conditions, and further, is adjacent to a major recreation area which receives a lot of traffic, as I'm sure those of you on the silviculture staff are aware.

5. Plunge into the heart of the subject, unless abruptness or disappointment justifies a buffer.

Example: As Tom Cordaci has no doubt told you, the appeal of the All-Terrain Vehicle Special Use Area has been filed in District Court. Enclosed is the letter from attorneys Black and White of the Office of General Counsel, together with a copy of our reply.

6. Begin with some point upon which you and your reader agree. Instead of refusing or criticizing, get in step first.

Example: Thank you for your prompt reply to our letter of January 8 concerning our question about appeals procedures.

7. As in a newspaper article, tell the whole story in a nutshell. The other paragraphs merely expand the opening.

Example: At Ms. Chang's request, we are sending you a supply of Spanish language versions of the reforestation brochures.

8. Consider appropriate humor that ties in with the message--but be gentle!

Starting Tips

What to avoid; what to use: A discussion of openings would not be complete without tips about approaches to avoid. Here they are:

1. The "ing" clan:

Avoid: Acknowledging your inquiry of June 2, I...

Use: Thank you for telling me in your letter of June 2...

2. The say-nothing beginning:

Avoid: We have your letter of November 18 in which you request a copy of *The Fireline Handbook* about fire suppression processes for the forestry reference section of the library at the University. (Don't tell your reader facts he or she already knows).

Use: We will send your copy of *The Fireline Handbook* next week.

3. Opening that stresses date of letter being answered:

Avoid: In reply to your letter of March 14, I wish to thank you for agreeing to participate in the District's open house to discuss vegetation management alternatives.

Use: Thank you for agreeing to participate in the District's open house to discuss vegetation management alternatives.

4. The trite beginning:

Avoid: In reply to your letter of July 14, please be advised that we have not as yet formally advertised the marketing position you heard about, but...

Use: Although the marketing position you heard about has not yet been formally advertised, we... (Instead of trite beginnings, be yourself and talk as if the reader were sitting across the desk from you.)

5. The emphasis is on the writer (wrong person!):

Avoid: We have your letter of June 10 and we have referred it to our attorneys at the Office of General Counsel, and they tell us we...

Use: You will be pleased to know our attorneys at the Office of General Counsel agrees with your decision on...

6. Incomplete beginning:

Avoid: Just received your memo of January 13 regarding the above subject.

Use: In your memo, you expressed interest in working on the inter-regional writing network. (In the future, be certain your openings get in step with the reader and say something important to him or her. Then you'll make a favorable first impression and catch his or her interest.)

About Closings

What to do: The closing is an important part of a letter because it contains the last idea or ideas that you leave with your reader. Here you have the opportunity to focus on an action desired, round out the letter, and take leave of your reader courteously.

What you say in the closing depends upon the purpose of the letter and ideas in previous paragraphs. The following points may help you.

1. Ask for action if you want your reader to do something.

Examples:

a. As soon as you supply this information, we can complete our design work and send your map to the printer.

b. If you finish the payment paperwork today, I'll hand-deliver them to the contracting staff for signature tonight.

2. Make action easy--especially to someone who may or may not reply. Include an envelope (if the occasion warrants it), put a stamp on it--and even address the envelope!

3. Show appreciation. Everyone likes sincere praise when he or she has earned it!

Examples:

a. Thanks for your help, Mr. James.

b. Thanks for suggesting this; it makes more sense than spending extra money.

4. Use specific dated action when you want your reader to answer by a certain time.

Say "tomorrow, next week, next month, January 17," **not** "at your convenience, promptly, immediately, soon, in the near future," or other vague expressions.

5. Stop when you have finished. Don't tack on a worthless "hoping to hear from you soon, I remain."

6. End on a positive note. Include your apologies before the last paragraph.

What to avoid:

1. The "-ing" clan:

Avoid: Hoping to hear from you soon, I remain...

Use: Omit entirely, or substitute "Your reply will help us to..."

2. Vague dated action:

Avoid: Because she would be a good volunteer for this project, please let me know soon what dates you suggest.

Use: Provide a date or time frame, such as "March 7" or "within a week."

3. Negative ending--especially those that give your reader the choice of two decisions if one works against you.

4. Thanking in advance--as a rule you don't thank until someone has fulfilled your request.

Avoid: We thank you in advance for your cooperation in this matter.

Use: We will appreciate your help in this matter.

5. Abrupt ending.

Avoid: We applied the six-hour annual leave category to your time records in error.

6. I-am-sorry ending--it is better to end on a positive note.

Avoid: I am sorry we can't be of more help to you.

Use: Perhaps the Lone Ranger District staff can be of more help to you. (Make a positive suggestion.)

A Few Words About Numbers

Many numbers are used in business writing. Although they offer no trouble on invoices, orders, and statements, recording them in letters and reports does pose a problem. The **general rule** is that all numbers are expressed in figures when there are several numbers in a paragraph, a letter, or a report.

For readability and clarity, the following **modifications** are recommended.

1. If a sequence begins with a number, express the number in words. This rule is used when the sentence cannot be effectively revised.

Example: Fifty applicants were interviewed for the position.

2. When a number standing first in the sentence is followed by another number to form an approximation, express both in words.

Example: Fifty or sixty will be enough. (**Note:** Try not to begin a sentence with a number. Rewrite the sentence to place the number within or at the end of the sentence.)

3. When a sentence contains one series of numbers, express all members of one series in figures.

Example: We had 25 applicants from California, 15 applicants from Oregon, and 6 applicants from Colorado.

4. When a sentence contains two series of numbers, express the members of one series in words and those of the other series in figures. This helps eliminate confusion.

Example: Five employees fought 31 fires, seventeen employees fought 15 fires, and eleven fought 6 fires.

5. For clarity, tabulate more than two series of numbers.

6. When an isolated number is below ten, express it in words. This rule does not apply to exact dimensions.

Example: She hired 56 employees.

7. When numbers are expressed in words, as at the beginning of a sentence, use a hyphen to join the compound number (twenty-one through ninety-nine). A compound number usually acts as a compound adjective.

Examples: Fifty-six; twenty-one; ninety-three.

8. When one number immediately precedes another number of different context, express one number in words; the other, in figures.

Example: You ordered 275 three-inch bolts.

9. When a numerical quantity contains more than four digits, each group of three digits should be set off by a comma (starting at the right). Obviously, this rule does not apply to dates, street numbers, serial numbers, and page numbers.

Examples: 1,000; 1,021; 5,280.

Money

Generally speaking, express amounts of money in figures. This is particularly true when a sentence, a paragraph, a letter, or a report mentions several different amounts of money. However, some questions invariably arise on how to use numbers in money amounts. The following practices are recommended.

1. When an amount of money consists of dollars and cents, always express the amount in figures. The dollar sign should precede the amount (unless in a tabulated column).

Example: The invoice total was \$5.51.

2. When an amount of money consists only of dollars, do not use a decimal point or a double zero. The double zero is not necessary unless the amount is tabulated in a column which includes both dollars and cents.

Example: The invoice total was \$150.

When a series of money amounts contains mixed figures, **do** include the double zero for consistency on all even figures.

Example: The committee raised amounts of \$15.00, \$33.75, and \$75.00 in the three fund-raisers.

3. Do not write an amount in both figures and words. (This procedure is acceptable only in legal documents and financial documents!)

4. Express an isolated amount of money of more than ten cents but less than one dollar (11 through 99) in figures. Spell out isolated amounts of money that are ten cents or less.

Examples:

- a. The piggy bank yielded \$.57.
- b. The piggy bank yielded 57 cents.
- c. The piggy bank yielded nine cents.

5. Use figures for an isolated amount of money expressed in even dollars (over ten). When the even amount is ten dollars or less, write it in words.

Examples:

- a. The check was for \$57.
- b. The other check was for five dollars. (If the number is an isolated amount.)

6. When amounts of money are to be tabulated, care should be taken to align the numbers correctly.

Example:

\$ 100.00
3.00
8.00
1,100.00
\$1,211.00

The right-hand digit of the largest amount governs the tabulation. All decimals, commas, and dollar signs should be aligned properly. A dollar sign should be used both at the beginning of a column and at the end of a column after the underline. It should be set far enough to the left to take care of the largest amount.

Miscellaneous

1. The following numbers should be expressed in figures.

Dates; house or room numbers (except number one); and numerical names of streets. Note: All numerical street names under ten should be spelled out.

Example: First Street; Second Avenue...

2. Other Numbers and Examples.

Decimals:	10.25	3.1414	.3535
Dimensions:	8-1/2 x 11 inches		2 x 4 inches
	8-1/2 by 11 inches		2 by 4 inches
Time:	7 A.M.		7:35 P.M.
	7 a.m.		7:35 p.m.
	seven o'clock		seven in the evening
Percentages:	(without decimals) 35%	or	6 percent
	(with decimals) 99.99%	or	1.09%

In text, as an isolated figure: six percent.

Fractions: (Note: in a table, fractions should be lined up with the last figure in the column.)

10.13

7-3/4

300.10

In text, simple fractions can be expressed as compound terms: one-fourth, one-third, one-half, and so on.

More Questions?

Consult your infinitely cross-indexed *United States Government Printing Office Style Manual*.

Serving Your Sentences

Transitions

When you write, you can direct the flow of thought by using a transition. Transitions come in all shapes and colors. Use them to indicate additional information, show cause and effect, provide a comparison, or furnish contrast or emphasis. Or use a transition to make a concession, draw a conclusion, or enumerate your points.

Transitions also allow you to make a parenthetical aside, illustrate an idea, or show a progression. Meanwhile, they help you define your purpose, identify a place, and indicate a result. Use them to indulge in retrospection, point out a similarity, summarize and emphasize a point, establish a time line, or show a succession in time or place.

Need clues how to do all these wonderful things? I thought you'd never ask! Following are lists of different words and phrases that will help you make the transition.

Addition

again
also
and, and then
besides
equally important
even more
finally
First, second, etc.
further, furthermore
in addition
moreover
then, too
add to this

Contrast

after all
although, even though
but, contrary to
conversely
despite
for all that
however
by contrast
in contrast to (or with)

Cause and Effect

as a consequence
because
for this reason, those reasons
hence
on that account
therefore

Comparison/Similarity

as the same time
by the same token
in like (or similar) manner
in the same way
likewise
similarly

Emphasis

above all
add to this
and also
besides
equally important
especially
I repeat
even more

Contrast (cont.)

in spite of
 instead, instead of
 inversely
 nevertheless, nonetheless
 notwithstanding
 on the contrary
 on the one hand (or other)
 otherwise
 rather, still, yet
 whereas

Concession

although this may be true
 but
 granted that
 at the same time
 even though
 I know that
 naturally
 now
 of course
 after all
 to be sure

Enumeration

finally
 first, second...
 further
 namely
 next
 particularly
 specifically

Illustration

as I will demonstrate
 as you will see

Purpose

for this purpose
 for this (or those) reason(s)
 to that end
 with this in mind

Emphasis (cont.)

in any event
 indeed
 in fact
 in other words
 in particular
 likewise
 more important
 moreover
 of equal (or greater) importance
 that is
 on the whole
 in the main
 for the most part

Conclusion

accordingly
 all things considered
 as matters stand
 at all events, in any event
 at any rate
 after all
 briefly
 even so
 finally
 for that (or those) reason(s)
 in conclusion
 nevertheless/nonetheless
 such (or that) being the case
 that being so
 therefore
 to conclude, to sum up, to repeat
 thus it follows

Parenthesis

by the way
 incidentally, parenthetically
 to digress, to resume

Time

after, afterwards
 as soon as, as long as
 at last, at length
 at the beginning or outset

Progression

for example, for instance
 incidentally
 in connection with
 in particular
 in this way
 just as
 specifically
 that is
 to illustrate
 as a result
 for that (or those) reason(s)
 further, furthermore
 hence, henceforth
 in consequence
 in the first place...
 moreover
 on that account
 therefore

Result

accordingly
 after all
 as a result (or consequence)
 at last
 consequently
 finally
 hence
 in conclusion
 in consequence
 in fine
 later
 so
 then
 therefore
 thereupon, thereafter
 thus

Place

adjacent to
 any where
 at a distance
 beyond
 close, close by
 close at hand
 everywhere
 here, there
 near, nearby
 next to
 on the same (or other) side
 on the near (or far) side
 in the distance
 on (or to) the left or right,
 behind or in front of

Summary/Repetition/Retrospection

again
 as has been said (or suggested)
 as I have said, stated, or noted
 if what I have said is correct
 if what has been said is correct
 in a word, in essence
 in brief, in general
 in fine, in short, briefly
 in other words
 indeed
 on the whole
 so far, hitherto, or up to now
 to repeat, summarize, or sum up
 we now see
 at the same time
 during
 earlier
 eventually
 finally, at the end
 formerly
 forthwith
 from now on
 henceforth
 hereafter
 hitherto
 immediately
 initially
 in the beginning or meantime

Succession in time or place

after this, after that	then
afterwards	to (or on) the left or right
at last or at length	lately
before	later
beyond	meanwhile
at the outset or beginning	next
earlier	now
farther	presently
finally	previously
formerly	shortly
henceforth	since then
hereafter, thereafter	soon
hitherto	subsequently
initially	temporarily
last	permanently
later	then
near, nearer, near by	thereafter, thereafter upon
next, next to	until
presently	when
previously	while
subsequently	

Rules for Use of the Comma

The many different uses of the comma may be grouped under a few principles.

Independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, yet, so) are separated by a comma.

Example: John and Mary are going, but Harry will stay at the office.

An **adverb clause** or a long phrase beginning the sentence is usually followed by a comma.

Example: After four years in temporary assignments, Tom finally got a transfer.

Words, phrases, or clauses in a series are separated by commas.

Examples:

a. The office is bright, clean, and quiet.

b. He rolled his wheelchair out the door, down the ramp, and out of sight.

c. We mailed a brochure, ran newspaper ads, and finally sent out a news release, but no one commented on our environmental impact statement.

Nonrestrictive clauses and parenthetical elements are separated by commas. Restrictive clauses are **not** separated. Nonrestrictive means nonessential. Some samples follow.

Nonrestrictive clause: Peter Armstrong, who worked in silviculture, put in for a transfer.

Restrictive clause: A person who wrecks a Forest Service vehicle is in for a lot of paperwork.

Nonrestrictive phrase: Our new patrol boat, painted yellow and green, has sprung a leak.

Restrictive phrase: A patrol boat with a leak is of little use.

Appositives, dates, and geographical names, and words in direct address are separated by commas. Examples follow.

Appositive: Dave, the management analyst, is a reliable employee.

Dates: Sunday, May 18, 1980, was the day Mount St. Helens erupted.

Geographical: The Regional Office is located in Portland, Oregon.

Direct address: I want you, Josephine, to write this report.

Generally, the comma signals a brief pause (periods, semicolons, colons, and question marks signal longer pauses) at which most speakers would hesitate. Using a comma when one would naturally pause is a fairly accurate practice.

Example: After he left, Arnie heard from Kathy, Dick, Gary, and Denver, all of whom said in retrospect that he seemed to have found a niche in his new job, but that he probably missed being in the Pacific Northwest.

Who or Whom?

The correct use of **who** and **whom** was once considered a test of grammatical proficiency. Today the rules of grammar are gradually being relaxed. But a totally relaxed attitude is not correct, and people still expect to hear who and whom used according to the rules. What are these rules?

"Who" is the noun, and the subject of the sentence.

Example: "Who is there?" ("Who" is the subject of is.)

Whom is used as the object of a verb and as the object of a preposition.

Examples:

"John is the one whom I know."
("Whom" is the object of know.)

"About whom did he speak?"
("Whom" is the object of the preposition **about**.)

How can you be sure you choose the right one and apply it correctly?

The trick is to **use the form required by the clause in which the word appears**. In the sentence "I can't see who is coming," **who** is the subject of the verb (**is coming**) in the clause "who is coming."

If you remember this, you'll be able to cope with any sentence in which **who** or **whom** (or their equivalents **whoever** and **whomever**) follows a preposition.

Example: "Give the prize to whoever deserves it."

In this sentence **whoever** is correct because it is the subject of its clause "**whoever deserves it**." In sentences like this don't be fooled into writing **whomever**, thinking it is the object of the preposition **to**.

Tip: In doubt? A good test is to substitute a personal pronoun for the who or whom you plan to use.

If **she**, **he**, or **they** fits into your sentence, use **who**.

If **her, him, or them** is appropriate, use **whom**.

Therefore: "He is the one who knows" (**he knows**); but
"They are the people whom I pointed to" (**to them**).

One last warning: Don't let little phrases like "I know" or "He thinks" trick you. In "He is the one who I think should win," **who** is the subject of **should win**, not the object of **think**.

Mini Quiz

Try these sentences.

Guess (who/whom) we called today?
(Who/whom) does she think she is?
(Who/whom) does he think he's dating?
It depends on (who/whom) is referred to.

Answers: whom, who, whom, who.

When to Talk; When to Write

Most writing projects are designed to fill a particular need, and to achieve a particular purpose for a specific situation. To do this well, management and writers need to work together.

The tasks of management include defining the project and the required reports; making sure that the writer knows what the report is to do, how it is to be used, and who is going to use it. Identifying purpose, use, and readers--all design factors in communications--is important. Without this information, the writer is in no position to design an effective written project.

One way for managers and employees to keep a project on target is to schedule a series of four conferences at specific points in the process.

Point 1: At the beginning of the project.

The purpose of this conference is to define the project, make sure the writer knows what it is he or she is supposed to do, and to specify what is expected.

What kind of decisions, for example, hinge upon this report? What is the relation of this work to the decision-making process of management? These are all questions that need to be answered at this point.

Point 2: At the completion of the investigation.

When the writer has finished any research or information gathering--but before he or she has reported on it--the manager needs to schedule some time to talk over the results of the investigations. What was discovered? What conclusions were reached? What is the main supporting evidence for these conclusions? What recommendations does the writer have? Should any future action be suggested? What is the value of the work?

During this conference, things that need more emphasis or that are nonessential can be identified. This also helps the writer fine-tune the project, and more effectively select evidence to support the material.

This review will do something for the manager, too: it provides an insight into the work that may expedite decisions influencing the project in one way or another.

Point 3: After the report is outlined.

A third conference is needed after the report is outlined. (See the section on outlining elsewhere in this book for a couple of the many ways that this process can be approached.) At this session, the manager and the author should review the report outline step-by-step. If the manager is satisfied with the outline, he or she should say so, and give the writer the "go ahead!"

If, however, the manager is not satisfied with the outline and believes it will have to be reorganized before the kind of report wanted can be written, this is the point to work through that problem.

Regardless of the method used to develop a satisfactory outline, the thing the manager must keep in mind is this: It's much easier to make structural changes at the outline stage (before the report is written!) than afterward.

Point 4: After the report is written.

The fourth interview calls for a review and approval by the manager of the finished report, and the preparation of a distribution list. During this review, the manager may find some sections of the report that need changing. While this is to be expected, this is a point where the extent of the changes should be limited.

The true test of any piece of writing is the clarity of the statement. If it's clear and does the job, the manager should leave it alone.

This four-step conference mechanism saves both the manager and the writer valuable time, and assures meaningful and useful project reports.

Technically Speaking

EIS-Breakers: Thoughts About Writing Environmental Impact Statements

A good environmental impact statement (EIS) reflects our sensitivity and respect for all resource values, as well as the beauty and value of each Forest. Probably the easiest way to do this is to use concise, well-chosen language--not verbose descriptions. While technical accuracy must not be sacrificed, strive for an easy-to-read, understandable document. Keep it as simple as you can.

Another tip: remember that women are part of the human race; use language which doesn't exclude them. Remember too that people lived on and near the Forest before European people arrived. Don't exclude them, either.

As with most effective writing, you'll do best to pursue the fabled "active voice." Simply use verbs that do something! Correct grammar and punctuation is also a good choice.

Keep sentences short. Paragraphs, too.

Keep in mind that a key goal is to document all of the alternatives and their effects, thus allowing the responsible official to make a fully informed decision. To do this--disclose and explain.

A National Forest is a wonderful but complex place. Making decisions about managing that Forest is also complex. Taking short-cuts in describing those complexities will only lead to mistrust and suspicion.

Don't take short-cuts in telling people:

- What's out there,
- how it works,
- what we could do out there,
- what would happen if we did, and
- how we figured that out.

Doing this well means striking a careful balance in your writing. It might mean that you have to say things several times--once simply and generally, and then again in greater technical detail. Or it might mean avoiding potentially confusing, belabored, overly-detailed discussions. Sometimes, a well-chosen example is worth a thousand pages of technical detail. Or more!

Purposes

An EIS, whether for a Forest Plan or some other action, has two purposes:

- 1) disclosing the environmental effects of the proposed alternatives in enough detail to help the decision-maker select and implement a course of action; and
- 2) making information about these alternatives available to the public so those who wish to participate can do so in an informed way.

EIS Audiences

An EIS is designed for several audiences. Each piece of an EIS--the summary, different chapters of the EIS, and the appendices--serves a different function and has its own user group. Thus, an EIS editor actually has to apply several standards to an individual document, depending on the specific section and its purpose. This affects the complexity of the writing in each section. ("Complexity" in this case refers to sentence length, average number of technical or "hard" words per paragraph, and similar considerations.)

The object, then, is to do your best to match the style, language, and graphics you use to the probable reader. In general:

- Introduction, Chapter I, and summary material is designed to reach the general public;
- the main body of the EIS (particularly Chapters II through IV) is designed for the decision maker, the interested and informed public, other agencies and local government, and those who will implement whatever course of action is chosen (typically Forest Supervisors and Forest staff); and
- appendices are typically aimed at the professional reviewer and those with a lust for details. They are by nature highly technical. Still, when preparing appendices, look for opportunities to make them more concise without sacrificing information.

The Four Deadly Virtues

Environmental impact statements need to be readable, consultable, traceable, and consistent.

Making It Readable

Readability is a virtue best achieved through simple language, short sentences, and logical composition. While your readers do not expect to be entertained by an EIS, they rightfully expect to be informed without being bored or confused.

One way to have a readable document is to say exactly what you mean. Make it clear what is going to happen: vague and general words inspire suspicion.

It's true that using jargon--the "insider's language" of accepted specialty terms--is seductive. After all, it's so easy to use--and we know what we mean! But not all of our audiences do, so resist temptation!

How? By being aware of times when jargon slithers into your text, when ordinary words could just as easily be used to get the same point across. For example, be wary of words like "treatment," "bringing under management," and "best management practices" if they tend to cover up the specific actions we intend. Instead, say "clearcut," "building roads," "fence," "pile and burn slash," or "retain snags"--if those are the actions you are talking about.

These terms aren't wrong. And we have a right and responsibility to use technical words or terms when precision of meaning requires them. However, we have an equal responsibility to assure that they are understood. This means supplying a good definition, example, or explanation in the text, the first time the term is used. So if you use jargon, be sure to tell your readers "what you'll typically see," and "what it means."

Making It Consultable and Traceable

Casey Stengel said, "You can look it up!" Since most people tend to consult an EIS rather than read it from cover to cover, we should help them to "look it up." Be alert to any device that ties the table of contents to the sections of the documents.

Graphics and layout are not used just to make the document prettier. They offer many opportunities for making it easier to use. Consult *Graphics In Forest Plans...Some Ideas* for some methods that will help people trace the development of your ideas. Photos, sketches, maps, and graphs all assist greatly in communicating ideas and supporting information to the public.

Attention to the appearance of the printed page or data displays also help your readers find their way. Bold headings, "white space" surrounding key thoughts, changes in type characteristics, and highlighting with graphic film are but a few techniques that contribute to making your EIS consultable and traceable.

Good graphics contribute immensely to public understanding and acceptance. Design them to specifically complement (or replace) information from the text and tables. Consult the *Graphics In Forest Plans* book for inspiration.

Choose graphics formats and page layouts that help you communicate with the audiences you have to reach, and then stick with them. If your Forest has a graphic artist or visual information specialist with layout experience, involve him or her in designing the graphics and layout of your document. If you don't have this kind of help, consider hiring a contractor.

Making It Consistent

Most folks (and particularly editors) who work on environmental impact statements are concerned about consistency. And what is true is that if you investigate the topic, you'll find quite a few con-

tradictory pieces of advice about consistency floating around out there.

Some people tell you, "It should sound like one person wrote it." Some don't care at all about such stuff.

Some do care, and go crazy trying to rewrite material about different disciplines by authors with quite varying personal and professional vocabularies. These folks, while on the side of truth and virtue...well, they may have some dangerous moments from time to time!

A useful attitude may be the notion that different resource areas do differ, and that some variation in style is okay, as long as folks strive to communicate at a consistent level.

This means that team members and writers are going to have to communicate, negotiate, and agree on a certain amount of structure from the start.

For some teams of writers, providing a firm outline of major and second-level headings right at the beginning helps. This provides a more consistent flow of information, and make it easier for readers to find a given piece of information that they want. (It will also make laying out your document a bit easier.)

From there, trust your resource specialists (who, after all, know best how their stuff fits together) to organize material within the text under each heading. Encourage them to provide additional, appropriate subheadings if they are needed, and to negotiate with the team leader and editor for exceptions if the major or second-level headings just don't fit their specialty very well.

This is one way to help an EIS team achieve consistency in form. Of course, there will be variations, depending on the resource. It's just about inevitable. For instance, in Chapter III, the task is to describe the affected environment.

Descriptions of purely physical resources--for example, water, geology, or vegetation--may be somewhat different than descriptions of resources that involve people or are strongly tied to management activities (such as recreation, roads, or timber yields). And these may be different yet from descriptions of social and economic conditions, which are also part of the affected environment.

Another way to organize parts of the document is to have the authors use a similar pattern when they write their assigned sections. For example, in Chapter I, each issue might be discussed in the same order: perhaps a general description of the issue, followed by some significant quotes from the public during scoping efforts, followed by a statement about how each issue applies to the decision or decisions at hand.

The same effect can be achieved in parts of Chapter II or IV by grouping text for each resource area in an established pattern--even if it is simply the old "introduction, discussion, and conclusions" routine.

Consistency of Tone

Some strategies for maintaining consistency of tone include identifying an imaginary public panel and "writing for them." Use your scoping response to help you. Pick five typical (not necessarily the "best") responses, and look at how those people communicate. You may not want to emulate them, but you will have a better chance of making them understand you if you pay attention to how they talk to you!

Tone Checklist

Here's a check list of questions to think about as you write your text:

- Does your text inspire these people to agree with your reasoning? To resist?
- Would they think you heard and considered their concerns?
- Could they follow your explanations?
- Would they feel you were objective?

These aren't the only considerations. But paying attention to them may help.

Before It Hits the Streets: Take Time for a Reality Check

If possible, use a panel of nontechnical readers (or perhaps a contractor) to evaluate how well your EIS communicates. If they are confused or don't understand, chances are that others will feel the same.

Good luck!

Abridged Technical Forestry Vocabulary

As with any type of writing, jargon is a problem when writing technical reports about forestry. Acronyms in particular can add to confusion. Here, for the edification of the uninitiated, and the delight of those who have dutifully been reading these improving words about technical writing, are a few terms and translations supplied by some informed sources within the agency.

CFI	Carefully Fudged In.
Carrying Capacity	The total number of six packs a forester can carry to the woods.
Forest Stocking	Huge stockings found in the Forest, thought to be discarded by Bigfoot.
Forester	One who sits in a lookout tower and plays pinochle.
Fee Owner	The forester who owns the pinochle deck.
Allowable Cut	The number of times it is permissible to cut the pinochle deck without penalty.
Pay as Cut	A penalty fee charged for cutting the pinochle deck in excess of the allowable cut.
Increment Borer	A device for making very small peeler cores.
Legal Corner	Where young lawyers hang out.
Mean Annual Increment	A very small salary increase.
Rotation Age	The age at which a forest manager's head starts spinning.
Section, Township and Range	A softshoe dance team from downtown Gouge Eye, Oregon.
Silviculture	A Latin word meaning: "Grow, Damn it! Grow!"

General Technical Report Formats

The way in which your report is laid out on paper is its **format**. For informal reports, no single standard format exists. However, your work group may have established its own particular format.

Most writers divide their reports into similar **functional sections**. You need to know the purpose of each of these sections, and what sort of information should be included in each. You can effectively arrange these sections in your reports in a number of ways.

The brief descriptions given below will help you design your own formats when none are provided for you.

Functional section

Heading: The heading identifies the subject of your report (expressed as a title), the author, and the date of the report. For an informal report, this information will usually appear at the top of the first page of the report, not on a separate page. You may center the heading, or you may place it in either of the upper corners of the page.

Abstract : Your abstract gives the reader the "meat" of your report in brief. A descriptive abstract only tells the reader what's included in your report. (It's a sort of table-of-contents in paragraph form.)

An informative abstract actually contains the essential information of your report. Nearly all of the reports you write will contain informative abstracts. You could consider the abstract the most important part of your report: **Most of the people who read your report may only read the abstract!** While the abstract often appears first in your reports, you must naturally write it last.

Introduction: The introduction fills the reader in on the background of your report (what the problem is, who triggered the report, why you went about the project as you did). The introduction should not repeat information that appears elsewhere in your report.

Text (body details): Here, include all the work you did on the project. The primary readers of the text of the report are persons who are keenly interested in the topic.

Conclusion: Your conclusion should emphasize what you think is important. Try to present your points here from a different angle. Often your conclusion will contain a closing summary.

Appendix (supporting material): This section usually consists of tables, graphs, charts, and illustrations. If these materials are sizable, including them in the text would interrupt your report and distract the reader. So you refer to them in the text, and **include** them in the appendix.

Technical Reports: What to Talk About

Technical reports can be a useful tool for management--both as a source of general information and as a valuable aid for making decisions. To be effective for these purposes, a technical report must be geared to the needs of management.

So what does management want in reports? A basic question, yet one that sometimes gets less attention than the mechanics of putting words on paper.

When a manager reads a report, he or she wants to know right away whether to read the report, route it, or skip it. For your report to wind up in the right place, you'll need to supply some concise, meaningful, yet fast answers to some or all of these questions.

- What's the report about? Who wrote it?
- What does it contribute?
- What are the conclusions and recommendations?
- What are their importance and significance?
- What's the implication to the outfit?
- What actions are suggested? Short range? Long range?
- Why? Who should do it? When? How?

One survey showed that every manager interviewed read the **abstract** or the **summary**; barely over half said they read the **introduction** and **background** sections as well as the **conclusions** and **recommendations**; and only a few read the **body** of the report or the **appendix** material.

The Body and Soul of A Report

Here are some of the questions about the "soul-searching" or-
ganization problems a manager must have answered before he can
make a decision.

Is it the type of work the unit can or should do?

**What changes will be required? In organization? People?
Facilities? Or equipment?**

Is it an expanding or contracting program?

What suffers if we concentrate on this?

The report writer should answer these angst-ridden questions
whenever possible.

Level of Presentation

Trite as it may sound, the technical and detail level at which a
report should be written depends upon the reader and his or her
use of the material. Most readers are interested in the significant
material and in the general concepts that grow out of detail.

Usually the management reader has an educational and experience
background different from that of the writer. Almost **never** does
the management reader have the same knowledge of and
familiarity with the specific topic of the report as the writer.

Therefore, when writing a report for management--write at a tech-
nical level suitable for a reader with an educational and experience
background different than your own. Are you a civil engineer?
Then write your report so your coworkers trained in different
fields--such as forestry, hydrology, or wildlife biology--can
follow your thinking.

In general, the body of a technical report is best written on this
basis. After that, the highly technical, mathematical, and detailed
material--if truly needed--can be placed in the appendix.

A Note About References

Setting up your report references is an entire art in itself. For help,
see the *Guide for Citing Bibliographic References in ANSI Style*,

adapted from the author's style guide written by Research Information Services, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland, Oregon.

Escorting Your Reader Through the Text: Style Devices and Mechanical Tricks

Often ideas and projects have connections to a lot of different things: ideas, people, and activities. Sometimes these connections are pretty tangled and tenuous. In fact, you'll find that they are often definitely not linear. Yet in writing sentences and paragraphs, we find ourselves bound by a linear form. By using certain simple devices of style and mechanics, we can help our reader see the organization we have in mind.

Style Devices

1. Overview, or opening summary:

If we open with a summary of our overall composition, we give the reader some idea of what we have in mind, and what he or she is in for. Such an overview is no place for subtlety. **Be obvious.**

Say, for example, "In this report, I have divided the problem into three main areas--project design, special concerns, and project timelines."

Don't say, "This report considers each aspect of the problem separately."

2. "Signpost" phrases:

After you've given your readers a verbal map of your report, keep them posted throughout, so they'll always know just what part of the report they are reading. Consider using phrases like: "Now for the second major point," or "An idea of equal importance to the one just discussed is..."

Mechanical Devices

1. Paragraph numbering:

So-called decimal paragraph numbering can help your reader or it can be annoying. Frequently, writers misuse this numbering so that it indicates nothing; they merely follow a sequential numbering system for all paragraphs in the composition. But properly done,

decimal numbering can clearly show your reader how you organized your thoughts. It also makes it easy for you to refer precisely to other parts of your report.

2. Headings:

Stick tags on things. But be sure you use a similar tag for each idea of equal weight. For reports that will be typed--especially on a word processor--you can easily identify the weight of ideas by:

- Use of capital letters,
- centering or indenting headings,
- double-spacing letters,
- underlining headings, and
- running-in headings (start text on the same line as the head).

You can combine these devices to distinguish a great number of different weights of ideas. Don't overdo it, though. If you find yourself using more than four different heading styles, for instance, take a look at your organization.

More than four kinds of headings suggests that the organization is too complex, and probably difficult for the reader to follow. The best cure is to simplify.

Tracking Ideas

One strategy for distinguishing up to four orders of ideas is as follows:

First-Order Idea (Centered, upper and lower case.)

Second-Order Idea (Indented, upper and lower case.)

Third-Order Idea (Flush left, upper and lower case.)

Fourth-order idea: When the equipment stabilizes, then...
(Flush left, lower case, and sometimes "run-in" to the sentence.)

In the Abstract...

Abstracts are important in technical communication, yet they are often inadequate, hastily conceived, and poorly directed. Two key techniques will help you improve your abstracts:

- 1) Selecting the right kind of abstract for your needs; and
- 2) writing them **after** you create your text. Never before. After!

Abstract or Summary?

Many abstracts are inadequate because the authors are not sure how to design them properly. To add confusion, many references on technical writing are inconsistent in describing what an abstract is, what a summary is, and whether or not those terms should even be considered synonymous!

To arbitrarily clear a bit of the confusion, let's use the term "abstract." Unlike the summary, the abstract appears apart from, and ahead of, the text.

An abstract is more of a "sampling" device than a review device. With the title, it tells the reader briefly about the main thoughts in the report. Then he or she can decide whether or not to read the details in the body. The original communication will shape the abstract, not vice-versa. Abstracts should never contain information not presented in the body of the report.

Types of Abstracts

The abstract serves the reader in one of two ways:

1. It acts as a **report in miniature**, a capsule version of the main report, highlighting the main points; or
2. it acts as a **prose table of contents**, indicating the main topics covered in the body.

Some textbooks refer to the report-in-miniature type as "informative abstracts" and the table-of-contents type as "descriptive abstracts." Don't let these terms confuse you--an informative abstract does contain technical descriptions sometimes, while the descriptive abstract can be said to inform.

Perhaps some of the confusion can be avoided by substituting "indicative" for "descriptive," as a table-of-contents type of abstract "indicates" what the report contains.

An **indicative abstract** can be written from almost any type of communication; an **informative abstract**, on the other hand, is not that flexible. For example, it is not suitable for a textbook or for any long and involved publication. There would just be too many significant points to abstract.

The **indicative abstract** is also **not** useful if understanding each point in the main text depends on understanding the point preceding it (for example, as in developing a theory or describing an elaborate set of instructions).

A well written **informative abstract** is a replica, in miniature, of the original. It too has a beginning, a middle, and an end, with emphasis on the key ideas or results. The **informative abstract** is at its **best** with shorter technical communications (reports or articles, for example) in which the reduction of text from original to abstract is not so great.

Reports on tests and experimental investigations lend themselves nicely to the **informative abstract**, as do reports that answer "how much?" or "how many?"

If the nature of the subject matter rules out the informative type of abstract, then use the indicative. If either type still seems appropriate, the next step is to determine which type will better satisfy the needs of the reader.

User Preferences

An informative abstract is preferred by readers who:

- wish to get the main points (such as results, conclusions, and recommendations) without reading the report itself;
- must take action on the main points immediately, but will eventually read the report; and
- wish to know special technical details without having to commit themselves to reading the full report.

The indicative abstract tends to be preferred by readers who:

- wish to know what the general coverage of the writing is;
- what the subdivisions of the report are; and
- how the material is developed.

The indicative abstract is a general-purpose device, though. Don't use it if a more specialized abstract will do a better job.

How to Pick 'Em!

In brief, write a straight indicative abstract only if the length or treatment of subject matter rules out the informative type. If both types are appropriate, write either a straight informative type or a combination type, depending on the needs of the intended reader.

What About Length?

Everyone agrees that an abstract should be short. But how short? One good suggestion is to make every human effort to keep all abstracts from running over one-half page: about 150 words. Naturally, a few may need to be longer if the information needs of the reader are to be met. But the majority will easily fit within the 150-word limit. In fact, many will not need to be longer than 75 words.

In abstracts that crowd this limit, the convention of confining abstracts to one paragraph often leads to extreme overcrowding. If the material will be easier to read in two or three short paragraphs rather than one long one, go ahead and break it up. Your reader will appreciate you.

Extremely short abstracts (one or two sentences) raise questions of justification. If the text is short, is an abstract necessary? Can't the reader get the information just as easily by skimming the text? Probably, but we still need the abstract to assist in information retrieval.

Abstracts and Titles

If an abstract merely repeats information already given by the title, should it be retained? No. It should be rewritten! Together, the title and the abstract form a communication unit. The title, in effect, announces the topic; the abstract develops it. The whole has unity, transition, and movement; any remaining redundancy is purposeful.

It is safe to assume that the abstract of a report, paper, etc., will never appear without the main title. Awkward redundancy between the title and the first sentence of the abstract should be avoided. Here is an example:

Title: Digital Simulation of Random Vibrations

First sentence of abstract: This thesis describes an investigation of digital simulation of random vibrations.

The first six words of this sentence are worthless; the remaining five do not contribute any new information. This redundancy would never have occurred had the writer thought of the title appearing directly above the abstract (as it does on an abstract card).

Language Suggestions

Helping words: All abstracts have a high density of significant words, but all need a few "service" words to make the reading easier. Don't forget to supply transitions, especially when taking whole sentences bodily from the text.

The time to establish the key words of your communication for the reader is in the title and the abstract. These words are the nouns and verbs that name, define, and describe the important ideas in your writing. They are the words that would permit accurate filing, referencing, and retrieval of your report. Use standard terms whenever possible. Be consistent in the use of technical terms. Use the same terms in the abstract as in the main text.

Acronyms and abbreviations: All but the most familiar abbreviations and acronyms need to be spelled out at first appearance. "NASA," for example, is sufficiently well known to stand by itself; "DCC" (Document Control Center) is not.

In conclusion: Here is an abstract that is both **informative** and **indicative**, not to mention **revealing**. It was written by a student after attending a lecture on brevity and honesty in report writing.

Abstract

As the reader would discover anyway, this report has no new results to offer. It should prove useful, however, as a means of reviewing what the project group has been doing for the past six weeks.

Mechanical Aids in Abstracts

Illustrations

There is an unwritten convention within the technical community that warns writers not to use graphic illustrations in abstract. Undoubtedly this came about because of limitations on the space assigned to abstracts, and also because many abstracts are published separately, some on abstract cards.

But is it wise to rule out illustrations entirely? They certainly could be used in reports that do not go beyond the family, so to speak, as long as you keep them simple, and they don't force the abstract to be longer than one page. If you believe that a sketch or diagram would make your next abstract clearer (and if you know you won't be breaking any house rules), go ahead and try one.

Subheadings

Subheadings can also be used in abstracts--they may not be useful in a lot of cases, but there's no law against them, and if they benefit your reader, then hurrah! Remember, of course, that you cannot often use a lone subhead. Generally you need at least two.

Words of farewell: Simply said--goodbye, good luck, have fun!